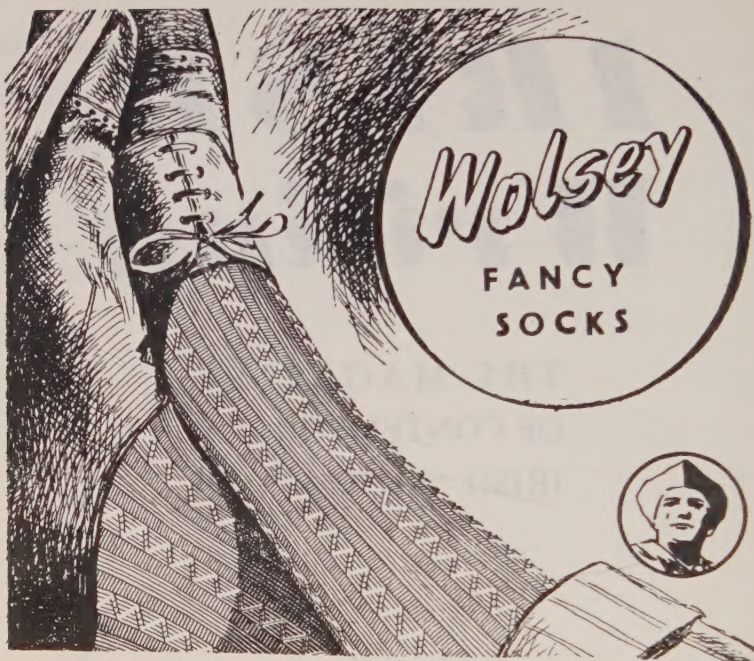


# ***IRISH*** ***Writing***

THE MAGAZINE  
OF CONTEMPORARY  
IRISH LITERATURE

## ***19***

Edited by David Marcus & Terence Smith



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# IRISH WRITING

EDITED BY

DAVID MARCUS and TERENCE SMITH

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## WILLIAM SAROYAN

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### FOUR HOURS FOR "IRISH WRITING"

SHAW WHEN I VISITED HIM AT AYOT IN 1944 SAID A FEW THINGS I have forgotten about his interest in the reform of English spelling. It was April then as it's April now, apparently eight years later, and I find I am interested (a little) in the matter of punctuation. How much of it do we need and how much of it is nonsense? I am also interested in form, a little more than I am in punctuation, and from time to time I say something about this to somebody or other, sometimes thus: Form in writing is needed by the unhappy man, that is the man whose soul is not achieved, who suspects it may never be; the happy man doesn't have to have form in anything he writes, it is all part of the one form of his soul.

I write on the day after Easter, from 24848 Malibu Road, Malibu, California, nine miles west of Santa Monica, which is six miles south of Beverly Hills, which is adjacent to Hollywood, which is part of the preposterous city of Los Angeles; notice the names Malibu (Indian?), Santa Monica (Spanish), Hollywood (what is the meaning of that?), Los Angeles (The Angels, Spanish).

I do not pretend to be a happy man. Still, I have always had a quarrel with form; and yet I am more often than not devoted to the theory of it, the hope of it; and in annoyance (with fools in the literary world) I have stated flatly that nothing I have ever written has not had form, including my one-word novels, particularly *Tree*. The form I achieved in *Rock* (not *Rock Wagram*) was perhaps better still, but I had a little trouble in the novel *Fire*. It took me years to know the form of this novel deeply enough to write it all out as I finally did on the back of an envelope in which a dentist had sent me a bill. (I have always resented them, but God knows they are in earnest and frequently do good).

The house is built on piling, the same as a dock, high tide brings the sea under the house to where the front door is. It is a house as a house in a tree is a house. I took it because the sea is under and in front of it and because it is a tree-house. Every one of the nine pilings is a tree blackened with chemicals to resist the salt of the sea. I have prayed for the pilings to grow branches. At the top of one piling I found small birds in residence before my arrival when I was chatting with the real estate man who said the house could be insured for everything except damage from the sea. (I hadn't asked, but I was pleased to know the safe-money boys refused to gamble on the sea.) The real



estate man said this had always been the situation, but there they were, houses on piling standing where they were put up fifteen twenty twenty-five years ago. Some are not standing, though, which he did not mention; some are leaning, some have slipped and fallen, the insurance boys know their business all right.

I give the house about a year, but a year is a long time and a house can surprise no less than anything else, it can stand two years, ten, twenty. The sea can surprise too: it may pick up and move off. The big black rock directly in front of my house (my house? careful, man) may not pick up and go but the birds that stand upon it always do, the gulls and the pelicans, and the bird which takes off suddenly as if it had just remembered it was late. The house has shifted a little during the 44 days I have occupied it, there are cracks in the walls that were not in the walls when I arrived. I didn't count the days, I just presumed they came to 44, I preferred their coming to that many, for that is my age too, but years not days, though it might as well be days for all I can say for my achievement. (Oh, I want to achieve all right.) I had that idea the first day I suppose, and still have it. Now, for instance, on the day after Easter I have an idea that before Independence Day (American), before July 4th, I shall achieve a new novel that will get out there in the open and do fine things. Why novel? We settled for that. The reader, let's remember the reader. He could be doing something else, why should he read a novel? Is it because he doesn't know every day he stays alive is a novel; or is it because he does? And knows he'll never write it? Never write it because Shaw's reform of spelling came too late or not at all, and my interest in punctuation didn't help?

Puerco Beach is the name given to the stretch of shore that lies half a mile either way of the house, Puerco being the name of the water in a ditch that flings itself in storms down and out of the hills into the sea here. Atascadero is another such ditch and beach, a little west. I mention this to get to the hour of day, to justify getting to more of the irrelevant, or relevant: noon.

During the 44 days I have been here I have brought certain basic things to this house and certain non-basic. Among the basic is Souvenir Playing Cards 52 Selected Views of Ireland Copyright Irish Tourist Association Printed in Eire which I now examine:

Ace of Hearts, Muckno Lake, County Monaghan: never saw it; Diamonds, The Four Courts, Dublin: saw it; Spades, River Lee and Patrick's Bridge, Cork: never saw it; Clubs, A Kerry Landscape: never saw it. I bought the deck in Dublin one day in 1949, was it April again? It was, it was indeed. I bought them because I saw them and because I buy cards wherever I find them for sale. Every card has a picture of Ireland on it instead of the other stuff we get on playing cards. I go quickly through the entire deck now, to see if a basic omission has taken place: it has. There is not one card on which appears one face: Girl's Face, County Meath, for instance; Old Man's Face, County Wick-

low, to go on. It is all places, and fine: only four or five cards show living things: several men and women on roads far off, several sheep, several horses. Fair enough, but a place is life too, and not human alone.

An airplane in 1949 took me from New York to Shannon, a car to Limerick, a train to Dublin, and across the table sat a medical student having tea and bread and butter, as I was, who told me about medicine in Ireland (because I had asked). It came to the same thing: birth and death, and pain in between. Pain? Pain *as well* perhaps, as well as no pain, for many's the man out of pain, many the times of exemption from it, great the times of fun and making.

I had to see Dublin after ten years. I had to see it again, for in 1939 I had started to write a play there called *The White Swans of the River Liffey*, and I wanted to cross the Bridge on O'Connell Street and look at the river again, and the swans, and wonder what the play would have been like had I ever written it. I crossed the bridge at daybreak, stood there, looked, tried to guess about the play. Not a thought in my head. Not a thought in my feet. All despair and anger because not only did I not write the play but had I written it it would not have mattered. (Why should a writer be sensible or reasonable? He can regret anything or exult in it. If he were sensible he would deal in real estate, buy and sell Ireland or California, wouldn't he?) I saw the Gate Theatre again too. Who were the White Swans? What were they? Birds? What are birds? Ideas? What are they? Language? Silence? Resignation? What are these things? I never wrote it, that's all. I began it, began to fail, put it aside, went home to San Francisco, wrote another play, took up *The White Swans* again, failed again, put it aside again, wrote another play, took it up again, failed again, gave it up but didn't forget it. (What do you want to be, an Irish writer? An American writer? A writer of English? A letter-writer? A slogan-writer? The slogan Never Again? Always? Now or Never? Forever? Take It Easy? Watch It? Don't Hurry? Get Up?)

I saw the people of Dublin too, the early morning people, my favourite people. Were they Irish? Oh yes. Were they people? Indeed they were, as they never were in stories, novels, plays, moving pictures. They *were* people, some on bicycles, some on foot. You'll never tell that story. It's lived and lost, winking and winging away every minute of every day. I heard them ride the bikes, I heard them walk the streets, I heard them speak. I could think, I can think of no way of giving it spelling, punctuation, or form, but it's my profession to write, to hope to do so, so I shall give it a go, try to bluff through once in a while. Why not? It's a living. I could open a bakery. My cousin Kirk (Gourken) was a baker in the Navy during the war and ever since he has wanted to open a bakery and I could go in with him. A bread bakery of course, we wouldn't fool with anything else. He knows



pies and cakes but we are a bread family and never took to pies as such.

I meant to look up my friends of 1939 and then, in the midst of searching for them, I was overwhelmed by fear and fled. We cannot possibly be glad to see one another still alive, I thought. We shall surely be unhappy about it, considering. What have we done? Were we the greatest who were writing, who had written, who still lived, who had lived, what could we possibly say or feel we had done to make us glad?—To justify our seeking out of one another again? What could we possibly believe we had achieved? Could we even say we had at least escaped disgrace? Could we say we had at least been merry and never terribly unkind? Could we say we had slept and wakened, at least that, rather gracefully, lying down with a certain resignation and rising with a certain decent anxiety to make a day work, make one day turn out with form, with style, with meaning to write home about. Dear Father, I hope you will be glad to know I tried hard, had good luck, all went well, and I do not need any money. I do not even need any love, for I found it all about. And so on.

In the midst of searching through Dublin for the friends of 1939 I became frightened and fled to London, from there to Paris, Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome, Marseille, Barcelona, Madrid, Lisbon. (I'll never tell it. Somebody else is going to have to give it form and meaning. Somebody else is going to have to believe [for a while] that he can do it, and if he happens to be reading this I want to tell him this: Don't believe you can't do it because there's no telling, perhaps you can, around the corner is the world, truth, beauty, form, style, get up and go around the corner, run if you like, walk, crawl if you must, but get there, somehow try to get there, you just may be the man who can seize it all and hold it together forever).

In Rome I wanted to write a play as I had ten years before in Dublin. It was about a corner of town where lowlifes gathered at a coffee-house and bar. I have written the name of the place down somewhere but I've forgotten it. I never wrote that play, either. It meant to have something to do, I think, with the Coliseum, all shot and empty, with the high-pressure postcard salesmen hanging around outside. The point was the lowlifes were as high as the high, or higher, better looking, more given to easy wisdom, to laughter and the telling of jokes, the making of witty remarks. I never knew the language, as I knew the language of Dublin, but I saw the language of their faces and heard the language of their voices.

I doubt if they told the joke they're telling in America these days, the one my eight-year-old son Aram likes so much. An American hepcat was in Rome. He saw a long line of people and asked of the last man in the line, What's this line for? The man said, We are waiting to be received by the Pope. The hepcat got in line and after waiting several hours reached the Pope, whereupon



he said, Man, where'd you get those crazy red shoes? (That was the end of the story when I first heard it, but a week later at the Malibu Inn, at the bar there, a girl just out from New York said somebody had cooked up an extension of the joke, thus:) The Pope knew this was an American, so he let the remark pass and began to bless the man, whereupon the hepcat said, Go, man, go. The hepcat, it may do to say, is a groovey soul, a man who is not unlike a dervish of the desert, all rhythm, all proximity to rhythm, universal or local, thus local, for instance: Two hepcats were standing on a street corner listening carefully. Fire engines came down the street, sirens wailing and bells ringing. The hepcats listened carefully and then one of them said to the other, Man, dig that arrangement.

But better than these jokes of hepcats my son likes the true joke that came to light in New York sometime in March of 1952. Willie Sutton, wanted by the police for bank robbery for ten years, was finally captured. Somebody said, Why do you rob banks? Willie said, I rob banks because that's where the money is. This joke plunged the boy into real laughter. *I'm going to rob banks when I grow up*, he said; and he wouldn't drop the subject of Willie Sutton until I had told him everything I had read about him—how, for instance, he had lived a hundred yards from the Police Station in Brooklyn for ten years in a furnished room, how on the day he was captured his car had broken down and he had asked two police to give him a hand, and how in his room was found not enormous sums of stolen money but half a dozen books, most of them of the inspirational, uplift, or comfort-giving order that have been so appealing to American readers for a decade or more, the kind that have made novel-writing such a hazardous and unrewarding business: *Peace of Mind*, *Peace of Soul*, and so on, the first by a Rabbi, the second by a Priest, and one or two others by amateur inspirers.

The boy goes down on the beach, climbs the black rock, comes back in a moment with his clothes sopping wet. Why do you climb the rock when it isn't lowtide?, I ask him. Because that's where the money is, he says. It's the running gag of his life. He long ago suspected he might have difficulty drawing some of the money of the world to himself (for kites, hammers, saws, bicycles, guns, boats), and so Willie's daring attitude appeals to him deeply; but he is still in earnest about finding out where his own land is in the world. On our drives to Fresno and San Francisco, in the mountains, in the barren deserts, he asks again and again, Well, what about *this* land, then? Can I have some of this? And I have to tell him he can't; he can't unless he has money with which to buy it. A good joke about real estate will move this hope out into an area of laughter some day, but he still can't understand why there is no land somewhere that is his own, and he has asked about Africa and South America. His sister Lucy, two years younger, is devoted to the idea of fine clothing and

parties and makes her own jokes about how she is going to be in the fine clothes and what she is going to do at the parties. (Kiss all the boys and not give any of the cake and ice cream to any of the girls, except Adele who is so plain nobody else in the world would think of giving her ice cream and cake.) Adele who?, I ask her. Adele, Adele, she says because she has never bothered about her friend's last name. Well, what's the rest of her name?, I say. Adele Adele Adele Adele again and again to the end, Lucy says. She's standing on the back porch looking at the ocean. A girl of eight or nine comes along the beach and stops. Lucy says, What's your name? Lucy, the girl says. What?, Lucy says, Lucy, the girl says again. Lucy turns to me. Is her last name Saroyan? she says. (That is to say, you can spell the words, punctuate the sentences, give it a little form, or try to, but in the end what does it come to except jokes and kids and what they're thinking?)

The house is for me to write in and for them to visit on weekends. On the far side of the black rock are thousands of mussels getting fat. When the spirit moves us we go out and bring in a bucket of them, scrub and wash them, let them soak in fresh water, steam them, eat them with a sauce of butter, garlic and parsley, with sourdough Frenchbread. A couple of miles east just off Malibu Pier are clam (or cockle) beds, to which we go now and then to dig them up and bring them home for steaming or chowder. Two or three miles west along the highway to San Francisco are the enormous Pismo clams, but so far we have had poor luck trying to meet the requirements of size imposed by the Fish and Game laws. The sea supplies these things abundantly (except the bigger Pismo clams), and they are good to gather and prepare and eat; but it supplies other things, too: rocks of all kinds, colours, shapes, to bring home and put about, as we do; all manner of driftwood for the fire or to keep; shells, including abalone; sea plants of all kinds; and of course sand. Sand is all over the place, all over the floors of the house, in their beds, they love it, to walk on, to dig in, to examine closely in the bright light of day, to pile and shape when it's moist. And salt and water, but the sea *is* water.

Write a book, the boy says, called *Life on the Sea*, and the next weekend he says, Did you write *Life on the Sea*? And the week after that, Are you writing *Life on the Sea*? (I must write that book.) When the storm washed up dozens of squid and all manner of gelatinous forms of life, and crabs and mussels, and every kind of weed and kelp, and flung them together on the sand and among the rocks he went searching through the gorgeous debris, wet and cold and handsome, as if he were in heaven itself, loving the sea, its power, its abundance, its enormity and rhythm. He came to a pale blue and black squid, picked it up, examined its arms and suction cups, dreaming swiftly and terribly. You know what I'd do, he said, if an octopus caught me, Pop? If this arm



was just a little free I'd bring out my knife and stab him right here, right in the middle here, and then he'd have to let go, wouldn't he? He'd better, I said. Why?, he said. Well, a knife like that. What kind of a knife would it be?, he said. You know, I said, a fast, sharp knife to make the biggest octopus in the sea let go, let go and take off. His eyes flashed as he dreamed about this and gladness came into them and he said, Yes, a knife like that, Pop; you get me a knife like that. Oh no, I said, that's your knife; you'll get that yourself. Yes, he said, I'll get my own knife. (A small boy's dangers of the imagination, dangers of the sea. What next?—to make a man fight and kill and get himself free and where he wants to be? And what weapon of defence?)

Spell it, punctuate it, give it form. What is there to say? We ate. Is that it?

Yesterday the three of us were up before daybreak, for yesterday was Easter and while none of us is much addicted to any specific or rigid religious lore, we all love the sun and fire and daybreak and we wanted to go to the Sunrise Service; there was only one in Malibu, at the Presbyterian Church, a mile back in the hills, overlooking the sea, and we were there in the first row, only a few minutes late, the choir going well with a fine hymn which we loved, sitting outside the church with the two hundred others, to wait for the sun to come up. The day was gray, though, the sky crowded with clouds, the sun never came up. It was great just the same, though. We were high up, the whole sea before us, the hills before the sea, the hills, much higher, back of us, the fine dark clouds all through the arc of sky, the little area outside the church prepared with calla lilies and folding chairs with an aisle down the middle, the pew outside with a cross of lilies upon it, the piano with the white-haired piano player at work, the choir to the right of us, all these people up long before daybreak because of something or other about this business of being somebody or other in this time and place. You ever go to work and die, Pop, the boy said one day, you know I'll go to work and have a son myself, maybe two. That's right, I told him. You're my boy all right, but you may turn out a lot different than either of us knows.

The good preacher told the story again, told it well, almost intelligently, and the boy and the girl beside me listened and were glad about it, but touched too, perhaps saddened. There was a boy in the row behind us, the boy said on our way back down the hill in the old Cadillac I will not give up, trade in, or junk, who was very sad, Pop. Sad? I said. He was very sad, the boy said. Why was he so sad? I tried to imagine but had no luck: there could be so many reasons for the boy to be sad.

Sometimes I think he owed it to himself, and to us, to have a son, and then sometimes I think he was right. Shaw, I mean. Why couldn't he have taken the chance? It was taken on him, and it didn't turn out so bad. Why did he have to remain his father's

son all his life instead of becoming a father himself? Or did he want to be everybody's father? It seemed odd at the time that among his last thoughts one of the most important was the matter of the spelling of English. What's spelling got to do with it? Or is spelling the answer? Is it the beginning of the answer? Is it possible even that *incorrect* spelling might be the answer and that we must be grateful to him for bringing up the matter at all, moving us towards the discovery that our best bet is to spell incorrectly?

The Americans didn't get Rock very well; Wagram, I mean. They didn't get the one-word novel Rock at all. But Wagram was a number of words, perhaps 75,000 of them, and they didn't get that, either. But this failure wasn't enough to plunge me into despair. At 44 I am no longer in a hurry, or so I prefer to pretend from time to time. The Americans don't have to get me. I don't insist on it. I don't have to get them and they don't have to get me. The New Yorker said I was irritated in the writing. Irritated? Irritated oysters manufacture pearls. (Oh, come now, as the boy sometimes says when I give him a fine explanation of something hopeless like money or art. At any rate, he knows great music when he hears it, and he knows knowing great music does not prevent him from enjoying other kinds.) Lay off the pearls. The English got Rock Wagram a little better than the Americans. (From the way I'm bothering about this I may be giving the impression I think this novel, this well-spelled, perfectly punctuated, well-designed-and-formed story is an important work of some sort. Well, it's not. It's kindergarten. I would be unfair to the truth if I did not also make known that I believe it is a good book.) Who or what influenced the writing of Rock Wagram? The author of Ecclesiastes, whoever he was and I've heard he was somebody, and time—my own—the forty-four years of fame and failure, neither of which am I able to regret. It was forty-two years then, when I wrote it, but a writer never stops writing anything he ever wrote, or writes. He goes on writing it the rest of his life, and every reader who reads it writes it again, for himself, every reader writing himself into the fable. Still, good or bad, readers of Rock Wagram write and tell me what it has meant to them, what it means, and some of them are not imbeciles, though I do not mean to belittle imbeciles, for great writing has always been devoted to them, and a number of good writers have been among them.

The day after Easter wears away, the writer in Malibu watches the sea as he writes, the form comes and goes, it isn't a story, an essay, a novel, a play, it isn't even prose—but it is what it is, and what it is is what he insists it must be. *Old Boy* is a book of stories he is gathering together for publication some day. He's getting along now. He's not a young man any more, but if he can hang on as long as Shaw did there's no telling what he may say, or how he may say it, and that's interesting, and he's interested. If he hangs on that long, forty-four will be a little less



than half his time, and after the fact it will be seen that at 44 (you can put it in numbers or write it out, you don't have to be consistent about it or anything else, God help you if you're a writer and you get the idea you've got to be consistent)—it will be seen that at 44 he was relatively a young man because he got to be such an old one. Still, when he was twenty or so Shaw was probably as old as he ever became; there's no way of telling accurately if he ever got any older than he was at twenty. You're just there longer, that's all, with whatever energy, interest or excitement you happen to still have at the time.

Where do you stop? How do you tie it together? The answer is this. To all who write, to all who wish to write: you don't stop, you don't tie it together. You don't stop because you can't, you don't tie it together because it's more nearly a matter of untangling what's already tied together, as the surf fisherman untangles his line after a poor cast, when the line is a backlash jumble. He untangles and casts again. If he's lucky he gets the line and hooks and sinkers out past the black rock where the fish love to sport. If he's luckier still a sporting fish takes his hook, and then if his luck is past the limits of luck he brings the fish in and it's a beauty, good to see and good to eat, and he looks at it and cleans it and cooks it and eats it, and again thinks and writes a novel, a two-word one this time: We ate. We were there at the time and God be thanked we ate. We worked, we played, we watched, we planned, we told jokes, we laughed, we loved, we loved everything, we 'began, began, began again, waited, watched, the sun came up and went down, we went to the rock for mussels, to the grocer's for salt, to the baker's for bread, to the library for books, turned on the radio for music, turned on the electricity for light. We didn't write *The White Swans of the River Liffey*, but we *did* write *Jim Dandy*, and it didn't matter. We took to the bicycle years after it was the way we got our earliest wages, this time for fun, and we rode, the boy beside us, the girl on foot running along because she couldn't ride a two-wheeler, running a block and then waving and waiting there. You don't stop. You go to the saloon when you must, to beer and whiskey and wild talk there, or the easy telling of jokes, to the soft laughter of wisdom or the loud laughter of anger and astonishment. You hang on. You hang on for your father, for your son and your daughter, for the Irish writers and for the American, to be a speck of the subject of their writing, and if you happen to write, a speck of the subject of your own. You read. You write what you read as you read, and you write other fables as well, a little of your own out of the other one, the one you happen to be reading. There was always good writing in *The New Yorker*, but no stories as good as O'Connor's. There was one there I wish I had lived to write, one I thank God he wrote. It doesn't matter where you're printed. Anywhere's all right, just so you write something. Two years short of being a professional writer twenty years,

I still hope to write something. And it isn't fame or fortune I want, either, it's just that I don't know any better, and must go on trying not to know any better.

Of course the key to Willie Sutton's joke is the word money, no matter how you spell it: muni, for instance.

You don't stop.

It makes sense. Any man's achievement, any man's failure makes sense. Peace of Soul was in fact written for Willie Sutton, who certainly bought or stole it and may even have read it. The way he lived, the work he chose to do, his answer to the big question all make sense. Almost nothing he has ever heard has so deeply pleased and satisfied my son, who is determined to set Willie free again, to get him out of the penitentiary, to take him guns and files baked in cakes by his sister.

What is our lore?

To win. To win against the odds. To beat the rap of denial and death, to take to all who yearn that for which they yearn. And children live this lore with the greatest passion and purity. Their hero is whoever they are thinking about, whoever he is. He is our hero too, and ourselves, and if we write we've got to write in a way that will justify us to read what we write.

Stop.

I can spell it and punctuate it but anybody can see it isn't where it ends.



## JIM EDWARDS

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### TULIP ESSENCE

AT THE WAKES, FUNERALS, AND CHRISTMAS PARTIES OF MY FAMILY, there always comes a light-hearted moment when Aunt Julie, a large and formidable lady, is addressed as Conshtable Murphy. Then, with any prompting at all, she will try to recite the saga of Madame Carey's Restaurant all over again. She never gets very far with the tale, for we young people can send her into near-hysterics by miming the big moments of the story in front of her.

Strangers hearing of it for the first time are apt to dismiss it as yet another extravaganza of the good old days, and you can almost see them subtracting twenty per cent all round for the sake of gains-in-the-telling. But there was never any need to colour the doings of Madame: from first to last she supplied her own exaggerations.

Julie wasn't quite a beginner when, as a young slip of a girl, she joined Madame's kitchen staff. Consequently, instead of paying a fee, she actually received a salary of five shillings a week, plus her keep. The work was hard, for the restaurant kept the kitchen on the run from morning until late at night. And yet, in spite of everything, Julie soon found her day filled with fun and frivolity.

Mrs. Carey—Madame to half Cork—was then a middle-aged and outwardly merry widow with a great weakness for quackery. And, at that time, one of Julie's minor accomplishments was card-reading. Madame discovered her at it late one night in the dormitory and, instead of raising Cain, demanded a reading for herself at once.

Later Julie realised that what Madame was after was some hint about her husband, from whose death she had never quite recovered. But, shivering with cold and fright in her long night-shirt, all Julie could do was to gabble out her usual nonsense about health, good luck, and good fortune; and then, recovering somewhat from her scare, a mischievous prophesy about two suitors who would shortly appear to claim Madame as their own.

"What nonsense indeed!" Madame snorted. "Get to bed, girl." But Julie was often consulted by Madame after that, and when the two lovers appeared—for two lovers *did* appear—she became Madame's companion.

It was a jolly little establishment. There was, all at the one time: a bulldog, Eileen, who bit the customers, and was only kept at bay in the kitchen with bribes of roast pork; a foul-mouthed

parrot called Parnell, who lived in constant danger from the dead Chief's admirers (but Madame had no political interests—Parnell the parrot was merely a good talker); A Holy Mary of a house-keeper so stern and strict that the girls, when going to parties or late dances, left the house, as a matter of course, by a rope-ladder hung from the dormitory window; and finally, there was Madame herself.

The staff, and particularly the girls, could never make out whether they were working for a crazy woman or not. Madame's opening gambit, with a new and green wench, was to send her off to the other side of Cork City to buy twopence worth of tulip essence. The poor girl would go off, eventually find the little chemist's shop where, according to Madame, the essence was sold, and there she would get the horse-laugh from the chemist. ("The ould wan's made a gom of you," Julie was told on *her* initiation.)

"That'll-teach you not to be a fool in future," Madame would greet the girl on her red-faced return. "Who ever heard of tulip essence indeed!"

Madame conducted her business in a spirit of brisk fury which was for ever in danger of collapsing into raucous laughter. She had started the restaurant shortly after her husband died, and brought it to such a high peak of efficiency that she soon found herself with as little work to do as she had in the days when she was a rich and happy wife. And I suspect now that her jokes and escapades were, in part anyway, fireworks and noise to keep sadness at bay.

As a rule, her place was behind the cash-desk of the little restaurant, where she sat drinking tea, raking in the money, and reading patent medicine ads. Only when something went wrong did she appear in the kitchen. There was that awful evening, for instance, when Clare, a pimply girl from Waterford, was cleaning out the ovens and dreaming of her holidays which were to begin the following day.

Suddenly Madame, holding a large and seemingly odious paper bag in front of her, was standing at the top of the narrow stairs which led into the kitchen. "Shanahan!" she called. "Clare Shanahan!"

Clare stepped forward, wringing her hands in terror.

"Ah, there you are," said Madame, with grim satisfaction. "I suppose," she went on, "you are thinking of your holidays? Well, my fine girl, you are not going anywhere until you learn not to send meringues like these out to any customers of mine!" Whereupon she began to pelt the unfortunate girl with the squashy contents of the bag, Clare sobbing and running this way and that, and Madame saying, "Ah, got you!" whenever she made a direct hit.

There seemed to have been a lot of sense in Madame's way of dealing with her staff, for, in time, Clare learned to make the best



meringues in the country. But weeping that night in the dormitory, it took Julie and the others all their time to prevent her from going downstairs to murder Madame.

We have a faded tintype at home of Madame as she was then, posing against a studio waterfall, her face set in an angelic and resigned smile. She didn't look the part she played: outwardly anyway, she was just a brave little widow-woman, battling for a living in a harsh and lonely world.

That was how her two boy-friends saw her, a rich and ripe plum for the picking. It must have been about the spring of 1912 when they appeared, in the nick of time. Madame was getting bored with the restaurant, and was dropping hints about a trip to her married sister in Australia. But when the two gallants came on the scene, she postponed the idea for a while, and latched on to the two of them with an inward and horrible joy.

Michael and Peter—Time has robbed them of both Christian names and individual characteristics—were both about fifty, Madame's age, and, according to themselves anyway, were doctors, specialising in rheumatism. Their story was that they had sold a lucrative practice in New York in order to return to the old country to save *that* from aches and pains. But, alas, they were merely quacks, refugees from O. Henry, full of seedy grandeur and nasal bombast.

They were partners in everything. Having failed to cure Madame of her rheumatism, they determined to win the remainder of her money in marriage, and, after the briefest of struggles, Michael was selected as the bride-groom to be. But Peter was just a step behind him, ready to give advice, or to clear the ground for a proposal.

That was where Julie came in, as Conshtable Murphy, a nickname which must have proved very annoying to the boys after a while. Her job was to see that the ground was never clear for Michael.

They made a curious foursome, setting off for Crosshaven or Blarney in Madame's pony and trap; the two old fakes in their threadbare finery, Madame in her saucy blacks, and Julie in the feathers and flounces she had bought to impress her own young admirers.

Julie hated the job at first, for she had one or two affairs of her own to forward. But after a while, Michael and Peter kept her so busy that she forgot about her young heroes. As the summer wore on, the two men became more and more anxious to clinch the deal, and Peter became very eloquent in his efforts to convince Julie that he had fallen madly in love with her, and wanted to take her, by the hand, over the fields, or through the woods, or anywhere at all, so that Michael could get on with the real work.

At last Michael, in desperation, proposed to Madame in front of them all. They had just returned from an evening visit to

Blarney Castle, and he was helping Madame from the trap, when the moment came: blowing nervously through his moustaches he asked her to marry him. Madame never even faltered on her descent to the pavement. "You silly wicked boy," she said, and performed the classic gesture of shaking her fan at him.

And there followed, in the livingroom over the restaurant, one of the scenes which, when we youngsters act it out now, can still pull up Aunt Julie in mid-tale: Madame, dignified and kind, but unbending; Michael on his knees, his bearded pomposity thrown to the winds, as he begged, wept, pleaded; Peter on his knees too, first to Madame, pointing out all the advantages of a marriage between her and Michael, and then to Julie, imploring her to get to hell out of the room.

It was a long and, to the suitors, a painful scene. It ended when Michael strode to the door, shouting in the grand tradition, "I'll kill myself if you don't marry me!"

"He will too," Peter assured the two of them hopefully, before he followed his partner from the room.

The row was heard all over the house, but Madame, summoning up a spark of conventional decency from somewhere, had her laugh out in the privacy of the livingroom, before sailing downstairs.

Over a cup of cocoa she said, philosophically, "Well, that's the end of that."

It wasn't quite. The two boys made another attempt a few nights later, and, receiving such a cold reception from Madame, who was getting bored with them, decided that desperate measures were needed to bring her to her senses. They primed themselves in a pub off the South Mall, and then Michael, who was a strong swimmer, jumped off Patrick's Bridge in full view of the crowds coming from the Opera House and the dance-halls. But Fate pursued him with a slapstick. The tide was out, and all he got for his trouble was a mud-bath and a sprained ankle, and an hour later he found himself in the North Infirmary, drunk, wet, and stinking, with two unsympathetic policemen hovering in the background until they could have a few words with him.

Michael and Peter left Cork shortly afterwards, and life in the restaurant went on as smoothly as before. A jam-jar fell from the window of the girl's dormitory, and brained an admirer. Eileen the bulldog went on biting customers until he got into the kitchen one night, and died of a surfeit of boar's head. And one confining wet Sunday, the Holy Mary housekeeper, goaded beyond endurance by Parnell's obscenities, carried out her oft-repeated threat to ring the bird's neck, and was sacked by Madame on the spot.

Then, with shocking finality, it was all over. The first bomb to be tossed in Cork for years was thrown at a police sergeant as he strolled past the restaurant one night. The bomb—a can filled with rusty nails and gunpowder—missed the sergeant, and sailed on through Madame's front window to set the place on fire. By



the time Madame had roused the staff, and shepherded them into the street in their long, billowing nightshirts, the flames had gained complete control of the building.

Such was Madame's satisfaction over the whole affair—the house and restaurant were heavily insured—that tongues wagged in Cork that she had hired the bomb-thrower herself. But Madame's only reaction to the rumour was to cock a snook at all and sundry, by sailing off to her sister in Australia. In the course of twenty years she buried all her relatives out there, and came back to Cork to die.

But Aunt Julie brought me to see her first, in the stuffy little house she bought in Sunday's Well. A resigned-looking priest shook his head at my aunt as he brushed past us in the hallway. And in the front parlour, a doctor and a nurse stood head to head. The doctor stared at me. "She's just been anointed," he said. "I don't think the boy should see her."

A bell tinkled upstairs, and the nurse left us, to return, looking a little flustered, a few minutes later. "She heard them come in, doctor," said the nurse.

The doctor shrugged. "In that case," he told my aunt, "you had better take the lad up with you."

I was only twelve, and up to then Madame had always been something of an ogre to me. But when I laid eyes on her at last, tiny in the huge bed, she looked as harmless as a sparrow.

She spared neither glance nor word for Aunt Julie. "Ah," she said, "so you are the lad who has taken to scribbling. Well, you look like a smart boy. Will you do something for me, child?"

I had been brought along strictly on condition that I played ball, but still I felt silly as the old woman clutched my hand with her bony claw. "Go down to the big shop by the bridge," she told me as earnestly as her wheezy voice would allow, "and bring me back a bottle of tulip essence. It's for my chest. Will you do that for me?"

My aunt gave me a warning glare as I left the room; and, clumping heavily downstairs, I could hear the old witch in the bed laughing and choking all at the one time.

But when I re-entered the house, having spent ten minutes kicking my heels on the roadway outside, my look of embarrassment and confusion went all to waste. The doctor and the nurse were in the bedroom, and Aunt Julie was crying. She rushed to put me out when she saw me, but I managed to catch a glimpse of Madame, dead, her wrinkled face set in a triumphant grin.

I can only remember being merely annoyed with her at the time, for not staying alive long enough to see her joke on me through. But nowadays, I like to think that, in the long list of her victims, St. Peter comes just after me.

## MAURICE KENNEDY

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### THE RUNAWAY

A SMALL WHITEWASHED HOUSE, HALF-BURIED IN A SOUTHERN SLOPE, the small back yard enclosed by vertical banks of sand and gravel with a fringe of shrubbery trailing over the upper edge.

Tiny plants clambering up the banks, and butterflies hovering there when the sun was shining. In one corner a much-scarred chopping-block, with a rusty hatchet sticking out of it and a pile of logs alongside. A wooden trough upon the bare earth in the centre of the yard. A hen and some chickens pecking idly at scattered scraps of food. Midges dancing above the rain barrel, under the thatched eaves. An ancient, ragged sheepdog stretched, panting, in the barrel's shade. The air still and sleepy with the heat of the growing summer.

Not even a goat could get out of that yard, except by skirting the gable of the house, brushing through the branches of the old elder-bush, and going down the pathway to the lane in full view from the open front doorway. Davy wanted to get out. He was tired of chopping sticks. He had big plans in his nine-year old mind: He could hear his mother moving about the kitchen, dragging a heavy chair across the flagstones, rattling pots and pans. He lurked behind the rain-barrel, hidden from the back door, and waited.

"Davy," called his mother from within, "come in here. I want you to run a message to the Doyles. Do you hear me now?"

No answer from Davy.

He heard her footsteps coming to the back door; immediately he edged around the house and scampered silently down the path, down the lane, along the uneven country road.

"Davy," called his mother again. She stood in the doorway and looked about the small empty yard. Nothing there but the chopping-block and the feeding trough, the aimless poultry and the drowsy sheepdog. "Where on earth has that boy got to?", she asked herself with resignation, going in again to the cool darkness of the flagged kitchen. She glanced unhopelessly through the low front window, half-obsured by a trailing wisp of dog-rose. No sign of Davy.

Dust was everywhere in that long summer. The road was drifted deep with white limestone powder, that filled up the rain-worn runlets and bandaged the wounds of winter. The dust was soft and soothing under bare feet, and little puffs squirted up between his toes at every step. Behind even this small disturbance hung a trailing cloud of dust, that settled slowly back or drifted



on the gentle airs to whiten the leaves of wayside bushes. It settled as imperceptibly and remorselessly as the passing of childhood.

He crossed a stone stile and went along the headland of a meadow almost ripe for mowing. In the long sloping field on a shoulder of the nearest hill, they had already started saving the hay. The muted rattle of a mowing-machine sounded like a faint far-off corncrake, seeming to change in direction with each shift in the soft wind. The isolated blue mountains on the skyline were each crowned with a small white cloud, and larks sang high above the fields.

He passed the gloomy little thicket of willow-trees, where the metallic brilliance of dragon-flies flickered in the dimness over a bed of wild iris. Dark oily-looking water squelched up from the swampy ground under his feet. He picked his way, trusting his weight only to the clumps of reeds that made firm footing. Somewhere near there was a waterhen's nest. No time to visit it today. Some other day, he promised himself.

He forded the river by the stepping-stones, the one in the middle that rocked and gave a delicious sense of danger, the great smooth slaty slab that was unbearably hot under bare feet cooled by the swamp, the rough granite boulder, and at last the precarious jump to the overhanging bank. Then up the sandy bluff and across the rabbit-warren towards the distant line of trees, trees that went up for thirty feet without a branch and then fanned out into a crown, all growing slanted away from the winter winds and looking like a row of feather dusters stuck carelessly into the ground.

The field was very solidly fenced, a solid mass of blackthorn bushes filling up the gaps between the trees, and reinforced with barbed wire. That was why it had been chosen for the annual sports meeting. Nobody could get in without paying at the gate. But Davy knew where the rabbits had nibbled a low, overhung tunnel through the undergrowth in one corner, a tunnel through which a small boy could barely pass. He wriggled through, lifted his head cautiously from the long grass to make sure that he was unobserved, and scuttled across the field towards the roped-off oval where handfuls of people stood about.

The sports was already half over, and had come to a temporary halt while a noisy argument went on. A disgruntled competitor had claimed that the winner of the weight-throwing contest had overstepped his mark and should be ruled out. The winner, as usual, was the local blacksmith. Nobody else had come within six feet of his distance, and, as he was a powerful man of uncertain temper, even the dissatisfied loser abandoned interest after a while. The blacksmith spat on his hands, put on his coat, and walked away towards the refreshment tent. The proceedings went on.

A man with a megaphone went out to the centre of the field.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," he bellowed, "we have the next event—the boys' two-twenty yards race. Entries taken on the field. Come along there, lads, we're late enough already."

This was what Davy had been waiting for: he dodged under the rope and walked across the grass, feeling that everyone was staring at him. The big mountainy boys, with their peaked caps turned backwards on their heads, looked contemptuously at him as he came up. The megaphone man came up and began to organize them into line, pushing the biggest boys to the back. Davy was the smallest there: the man led him forward a few yards, at which there was a murmuring from the others.

"Now lads, steady up there," said the man. "I'll give yiz the usual—one to get ready, two to make steady, three to go." Davy's stomach suddenly felt hollow and heavy. "Are yiz right there? Ready. Steady. Go!"

With the sound of the sudden shout echoing in his ears, Davy began to run as if a mad bull were after him instead of merely the mountainy boys, whose feet were pounding the grass closely at his heels. He stepped on a thistle without stopping to consider the pain. There was an ache in his side, the blood hammered in his ears, the faces of the crowd swam before his eyes as he came around the bend. The noise of his own breathing was so loud that he could no longer hear the muffled battering of the other footsteps. And then in a moment there was the flag waving and a couple of people cheering and he crossed the line and tumbled on the grass. Running feet trampled on him and pummelled the breath out of him and then a strong hand lifted him by the shoulder.

"Good man, yourself," said a voice above him, "what's your name?"

"Davy Ryan, sir," he gasped painfully.

"Right so," said the voice, "come and get your prize at the tent after the tug-o'-war."

Davy sat at the side of the tent recovering his breath. It was very warm there, and he went to sleep for a while, filled with mild triumph. Officially the tent only sold tea and soda buns, but the tables were made of planks laid over boxes, and the boxes weren't entirely empty. Men went into the tent, lingered briefly, and came out wiping their mouths with the backs of their hands. Thanks to the fine day and the contents of the boxes, a feeling of good fellowship spread over the crowd. Even when a row started over an allegation of cutting inside the pegs in a bicycle race, it was a good-humoured row with more laughter than hard words.

The tug-o'-war started and the shouting woke up Davy. It was always an occasion of fierce inter-parish rivalry. Shouts of "Come on, Monaghanrim" and "Get down to it, Knockdoorish" echoed around the field, and the terrified wood-pigeons rocketed noisily up from the trees. Both teams swayed and jostled, unable to gain an advantage, and the crowd joined in a unanimous roar of



"Pull, yiz lazy divils!" Slowly the white handkerchief, knotted around the rope, began to waver towards the home team's line, and the anchor-man took a halting half-pace backwards, the veins standing out on his face. The movement became more rapid, and the opposing team were dragged forward, their heels tearing great patches in the earth. The handkerchief crossed the line, and an immense noise of cheering and groaning went up from the crowd before they began to turn away and leave the field. The sports was over, for another year.

Davy collected his prize, an ornate and useless cake-stand, and walked down the mossy breen from the field. He would go home by the road, that all the neighbours might see him. The prize, useless as it was, might serve to pacify his mother. He whistled and skipped as he went along. On the triangle of grass where the breen joined the road, a group of boys were standing. He glanced once at them casually, and then he began suddenly to be afraid.

The mountainy boys waited there on the grass, shoulders hunched, hands in their pockets. They had a bad reputation, those mountainy boys. They were said to be all related to one another, the twenty or thirty families living on the barren hill. They scraped a living of sorts by poaching and trading horses, and looked down on the softer village people. They were primitive and violent. They kept a grudge alive to the fourth generation. Nobody interfered with them if he could help it.

Davy didn't know what to do. It was too late to turn back. Perhaps they weren't waiting for him at all. Perhaps if he walked ahead carelessly, with an appearance of reckless bravery . . . As he approached, they spread out casually across the lane, and his whistling died away. He had to stop at last, a few inches from the biggest boy. They stood there, staring at one another and not saying a word.

Then someone pushed him unexpectedly from behind and he stumbled against the other, who pushed him back savagely. The bigger boy sneered, disclosing twisted, blackened teeth. "Hit me, would you!" he said. Without warning, he slapped Davy across the face. Tears came, in spite of himself, to Davy's eyes, and the boys jeered. They were all around him now, coming gradually closer.

In desperation, his fingers tightened on the handle of the cake-stand; then he swung it with all his strength against the shins of his chief tormentor. The boy cursed loudly and bent down, and Davy hit him in the face as hard as he could. He fell and Davy jumped over him and made off down the breen, slipping on the mossy stones, with the others in pursuit. When he came to the road he ran right across it, pulled himself onto the top of a stone wall crowned with rusty barbed wire, and threw himself over into the next field. He heard something tearing, but could not stop. The boys had found a heap of road-metal. A stone whistled past his

head, and another struck him brutally on the elbow. Stones began to come down all round him. A sharp lump hit him in the ribs, driving the breath out of him. He twisted his ankle in a rabbit-scraps and fell heavily on his face; as he did so, a large stone that would otherwise have struck his head sailed harmlessly by. He lay there, unable to rise. He lay there in helpless terror.

After five long minutes, he slowly moved, surprised to find himself safe. He realised that the boys must have thought that the last stone hit him, that he had been seriously injured, perhaps killed. Even for the mountainy boys, that was a bit intimidating. His brief spell of terrorised immobility had been his salvation. The boys were probably making off towards the mountain as fast as they could. A fit of impotent anger shook him as he realised that they had his hard-won prize, his lovely shiny cake-stand, his peace-offering for an indignant mother.

He got to his hands and knees, and slowly, clumsily, to his feet. His ankle was swollen and tender and he limped as he walked. He discovered that the seat had been torn out of his trousers by the barbed wire, and weeping would hardly mend it. His mother would be doubly furious. Even the sunlight seemed cold and callous. He limped painfully towards home and retribution.



## END OF A CHRISTIAN BROTHER

I COULD SEE THAT ARTHUR WAS A TRIFLE ANNOYED INSIDE HIMSELF when Cathal, whom we were meeting at the usual place, came in with a fresh-faced young man who was a stranger to us. Arthur, who is a distinguished figure in our City, and indeed beyond it, likes to know with whom he is drinking. Indeed Arthur has always been more correct, if you know what I mean, than the rest of us, and his liking for pubs is at odds with his dislike for loud voices and extravagant gestures. He dislikes argument, too, about matters such as religion; and for that reason feels himself pretty safe with Cathal who, coming from the North, has a good share of its caninness and caution. However he nodded to the stranger whose name was Michael Burgess, and seemed to be prepared to be friendly enough when Cathal said that Burgess, though one of the robbers from the income tax people, had just had a poem accepted by the *Bard*, and it would be appearing in the next issue.

So the drinks went round till there came the blessed moment when enough whiskey has been taken to unloosen that careful catch in men's speech as they address one another, to thaw their hearts and brighten their eyes. Burgess was the last to loosen up, contenting himself with listening appreciatively to our mention of this one and that, and the stories that would follow as a painter is called in to make an illustration to the written word. But he and Cathal had had a few before they met us, and he was well at ease when the conversation turned on the English whom we spoke of—as Irishmen at that time and in that place usually do—with a sort of patronising admiration. Giving John Bull his due and maybe a trifle over. I said that the English had never really managed to hate Hitler, not even when the bombs were falling on their houses, and that nowadays they thought of him as a silly little braggart with a Chaplin moustache who, like the frog in the fable, had blown himself up till he had burst.

Arthur nodded approvingly and said, "And that's the only civilised way to deal with any monster, just to laugh him out of existence."

He spoke a bit dogmatically, and I saw Burgess shoot him a questioning glance.

Cathal said, "That's not the cut of the Irish though whether they be from North or South. I believe that story we've all heard of the German airman who came down in Belfast, and was torn to bits by the women. They gave him no cup of tea like the

English would, before handing him nicely and politely over to the police."

"Well, Belfast!" said Arthur, closing his eyes against the extravagances of that black and bigoted city.

"Could something similar to that happen in Dublin?" I asked.

No one said anything for a moment, and then it was Burgess who spoke, fixing me, "Yes, it might easy have happened in Dublin."

There was something so assured in his voice that we all looked at him, and the same thought, I wager, passed through our minds. He was too young to have been in the Troubles, to have known the bitterness between Free Stater and Sinn Féiner. He belonged to the generation that shrugged cynically over politics, and were more interested in Rita Hayworth than ever they were in Kathleen Ni Houlihan. He felt our question, and answered it simply:

"I was just thinking . . . talking of hating put it in my mind, of something that happened when I was at school."

"What school was that?" asked Arthur.

"I was with one of the Christian Brothers' Schools," said Burgess. "An orphanage." And Arthur didn't say, 'Ah,' but I know he thought it as he reached for our glasses, waiting for Burgess to empty his, and then took them up to the bar.

I think it was that last drink that sent Burgess over the border line to lack of self-consciousness, and made him answer my question. "And what was it that happened?" with a sudden surrender to the need for detail.

"We had a Brother there whose name was Jeremiah Lenehan. Most of the Brothers were decent enough, though, of course, there were one or two we didn't care for. But there was no Brother hated the way we hated Brother Lenehan. And we had reason to hate him because he was the lowest most filthy swine that ever taught arithmetic or anything else. He had a fat pale face and ginger hair, and he'd think nothing of knocking a boy down that annoyed him. Many a time he'd clout me, first on one ear and then on the other, and mostly the Brothers were gentle enough with me, because in those days I was a quiet enough little fellow, mooning about and thinking of my dead mother."

He smiled apologetically, and we nodded back. Arthur had set the drinks in front of us, and we raised our glasses, and then Burgess, frowningly now, went on to explain about Brother Lenehan.

"But it wasn't only the way he hit us. He took a great and vast delight in thwarting and frustrating, such as I've never observed before or since. If a lad had an invitation to go out, maybe to spend the week-end with an aunt or something, he'd do his best to drag something up against that boy so that he could go to the Superior with some tale against giving him permission. The Sup-

erior was a kind old man, but he was getting past his job, and letting the others have too much authority. Anyhow Lenehan seemed to get his way, and a mean way it was because he was mean right to his bones."

"A sadist? Well, I suppose most schools have them," suggested Arthur. But Burgess didn't seem to hear. He went on:

"Looking back though I wouldn't say that we hated him, not to say really *hated* him till the day we found he'd killed the dog on us. This dog had attached himself to us one evening and we coming back from the playing field. It was a poor half-starved mongrel and it came after us wagging its tail, and jumping up, and showing us the same delight as if he was sure we had been the friends he was waiting for ever since the day someone had thrown him out. He wouldn't go back when we got to the gates, but stood there with all the hope and love in the world looking out of his eyes. So one of the fellows got the idea of smuggling him into a little tarred shed at the back where the old gardener, Pat, kept his tools. There was one lad who always had more pocket money than the rest of us, and he slipped Pat half a dollar to keep quiet about the dog, and the old man swore he'd say it was his own dog if any questions were asked. And oh, we had the greatest gas in the world over that little dog, saving our scraps from the plates to give him, and whenever we were in the yard sneaking off, while another fellow kept the look-out, to give him a word. And he was as cute as cute, never letting on he was there whenever the Brothers were about, and seeming to know when we took the risk of taking him for a run and not one bark out of him but his little tail wagging like mad. No racing greyhound ever gave as much pleasure and pride and sport as that dog, Timmy, as we called him. Some of the big fellows were on the bullying side themselves, but they'd pat that dog and smuggle him outside the gates, and go through the garbage tins to try and get him a bone to play with, as if he was the dearest thing in their lives. And so he was while he was alive. I think the way it was he kept love in us while he was there so that we couldn't help being happy in spite of everything."

He stopped talking and brooded. Arthur said in a rather impatient voice, "So he was killed or something, was he?"

"Yes, he was killed. Poisoned. Pat told one boy that he'd found him stretched out stiff when he came early one morning, and the word went round. There was nothing more we could do for him but bury him, and we did that quite openly, because it didn't matter any more. We buried him at the back of the playing field and we said as much as we could remember of the Litany for the Dead and the prayers for the Dead over him. And after that we stopped loving and we started to hate. It was then that we really hated Brother Lenehan.

"Because, of course," said Burgess lifting his head up and looking straight at us, "it was Brother Lenehan who did it. We'd



have known that even if we hadn't seen the satisfied looking grin he had on his puss."

"You might," said Arthur, "I won't say you were, but you *might* have been mistaken?"

Burgess shook his head. "There was no one else in that school, bad and good and grey as they were, who would have done a thing like that, but Brother Lenehan. You weren't there, so you don't know. You see Brother Lenehan really hated us, hated boys. Looking back I can understand how he got that way. He had to learn them what they didn't want to learn, and early on he must have lost his temper for good, and started the clouting, the knocking about, the shouting, seeing us all in a mass as a horrible hateful enemy. When he killed Timmy we understood that deep inside us, so we started hating him back. Everything we could do to make his life a torment and a curse to him we did. I remember some of the fellows got into his room and went through his things, and found a bottle of hair dye, and the number of ways they had for throwing up to him that they knew he dyed his hair was a marvel. There was a queer exciting feeling all through the school in those days; it was as if it was a fight to the death between ourselves and him, like a holy war, like a Crusade, to avenge Timmy. And then suddenly he died, and it was that part that I shall never forget however long I live."

As he paused, looking down at the table, Cathal got up, and in his unobtrusive way, collected the empty glasses, and went up to the bar. But I don't think Burgess noticed he had gone; he was so deep in the past.

"I remember it," he said, looking at me, "because you see I was the one that saw from the beginning what happened when the body was brought into the school chapel. The Brothers were going to keep an all-night vigil over it, but it must have been while they were having their supper that one of them asked me, I suppose because I was one of the quieter ones, to go into the chapel. I knelt down right at the back, and started to say my Rosary, anything to keep my mind off the coffin and the flickering candles. I'd look at the red lamp before the Altar, at the statues, and I'd mutter, 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.' But it was as if I couldn't get away from Brother Lenehan. I'd find a resistance in my heart, and I'd say, 'But Holy Mary, understand I'm not praying for Brother Lenehan. I can't do that.' Then I'd be looking at the bier again.

"And then I wasn't looking at the bier, but looking round, for I heard a scuffling noise outside the door; it was opened, and it was shut, and then it was opened again, and a whole gang of the fellows came in. The face I remember though, and the face that took charge right from that moment when I was cowering there, wondering what was going to happen, was Tommy Kavanagh's face with its bang of dark hair falling over his forehead, a whitish face he had."

Cathal set the drinks in front of us, and Burgess gave him a nod and raised his glass. Then he went on in a musing tone. "It's funny about Kavanagh: up to that moment I wouldn't have said that he hated Lenehan more than the rest of us, or had any special grudge. But it was Kavanagh all right who led the fellows into the chapel and up to where the coffin was resting only a few yards down from the sanctuary. It was Kavanagh I saw shaking his fist over the coffin which the next morning and, in that same spot, would be sprinkled with holy water, and then clenching both fists and jumping about its four sides, and the other chaps copying him. It was Kavanagh who started the cursing, 'You're dead meat now, you bloody old sod,' I heard him say, and I daren't look any more for a bit, because I thought he and the rest might all be struck down dead for using bad words in the chapel in front of our Lord in the Tabernacle. But when I peeped again, they weren't dead, but going on with their jeering, and worse they were hammering at the coffin itself. 'Come out you blackguard, you poisoner, you murderer,' they were saying quite loudly, and Kavanagh going on with his cursing, 'You're going to burn now, in the hottest part of hell, God damn you, and melt you.' Oh, there was nothing they didn't say, and I kneeling paralysed with fright, and thinking that this was the wickedest thing I'd ever seen or ever would see, and yet satisfied in a way too. Well, what else they'd have done I wouldn't care to say, but a lad at the door was keeping cavey, and he beckoned them and whistled, and the next moment they were out of the chapel like bloodhounds drawn from their prey. The moment after one of the Brothers came in, and he looked round at me, but, of course, I had my eyes shut and my lips moving. Then I let on to see him, and got up and crawled out, more dead than alive."

Burgess took a drink, and then with a half smile on his face, went on, "You needn't think that was the end of it though. There's a saying about joy coming in the morning, isn't there? Well, I can tell you that the next morning which was the morning of the funeral, and we were all turned out to follow the corpse in procession to the cemetery, there wasn't one of us that hadn't great joy in his heart. We were light-headed with relief, as if a great stone had been rolled away, and we went along grinning and capering, making it all into a hooley. There was another hearse just ahead, and we let on we thought that this was the hearse we were following, and we rushed on after it, and had to be chased back by one of the Brothers, and his face red with rage and mortification, and he saying, 'You fools, come back here,' and all the people stopping and staring and wondering what was up, and we saying, 'Oh, was that the wrong hearse? Oh, we're very sorry! Oh, we never had the least idea!' And then behind his back going off into fits of laughter, and thumbing the coffin, and then pretending we were just blowing our noses and coughing. We weren't let in to the mortuary chapel; by that time I reckon they

knew something was up, but we stood outside jiggling up and down, and rubbing our hands. And Kavanagh was sending us into stitches, though some of the fellows got a bit quiet and uneasy, by muttering a parody of what he thought or knew the priest was saying, 'Enter into judgement with Thy servant, Lord . . . . may eternal darkness receive him . . . . into the depths, O Lord with him . . . . let him not escape the punishment of his sins . . . .'

Burgess stopped, and looked round. I think he thought he might be offending some of us. Reassured, he went on, "Well there it was. Never shall I forget Kavanagh and his white face and the half grin whenever he'd ended some malediction so that I couldn't take my eyes from him, and then the coffin being borne out again, and some fellows starting to spit after it, and even venture on a hiss, till the Brother in charge shooed us off as if he were shooing off prowling cats, and told us to go back to the school. We thought we'd be in for it after, but, no, nothing happened. I think we'd got the other Brothers sort of scared. Or the Superior came to see how it was, and thought it better to leave the thing quiet. That it would only make scandal."

There was a silence for a moment. Then Cathal said in his dry way, "You don't seem to have cared for that Christian Brother very much?"

"No," said Burgess, his face relaxing. "No, we didn't. We didn't care for him any more than the Belfast women cared for that German airman you were speaking about."

"What became of Kavanagh?" I asked. "Did you keep in touch with him after you left?"

"No, I didn't. But a year or so back some fellow I met told me he was selling shirts in a shop in Cork."

"Yet another spoilt priest, I suppose," I heard Arthur sigh as I took the glasses up to the bar.



## DAVID HAYES

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### ANNIVERSARY

THE CHILD HAD BEEN CRYING FOR A FULL HALF HOUR BEFORE THE woman went out to it. She knew from the sound of its cry that there was nothing wrong with it, but its insistence irritated her. When she stepped outside, the heat of the August sun took her momentarily unawares. There was no wind and the narrow, walled garden had accumulated an oven-like warmth, far more stifling than the kitchen where she had been working. Only once before had she experienced such heat—in Lourdes three years ago where she spent the second half of a fortnight's honeymoon. Whenever she remembered that week, she quickly put it from her mind; pilgrim piety and nuptial ardour were theologically incompatible to her.

She bent over the pram and the warm stench of urine and vomit nauseated her. The child's face was greasy with sweat and the piece of chocolate she had given it earlier had matted in its hair, melted and run down the burning cheek. She felt it was the most repulsive object she had ever seen, and the fact that it was her own child only heightened her revulsion. She went back to the kitchen through the clinging heat and returned with a towel moistened at one corner. After wiping the child's face and hands, she was able to look on it more easily, almost fondly. It began to cry again and she left it with an exclamation of impatience and went back to the house.

Despite the heat of the day, the kitchen was full of steam when she returned. The pot containing the day's dinner of corned beef and cabbage, had boiled over, making the place reek with its greasy odour. She carried the pot over to the sink and allowed the bright green liquid to drain off. A lock of hair fell lank and damp against her cheek and she pushed it back into place with her wet hand. She hoped she would have the energy to wash her hair later on.

The sound of her husband's key in the hall-door recalled her to the fact that the dinner was not ready, and anticipating his peevishness, a warm wave of irritation suffused her. He came in, shedding his blue jacket, and sat down, shirt-sleeved, at the unlaid table.

"God," he said, "it's hot, bloody hot."

"Put down a plate and a knife and fork for yourself," she said.

"Ah, Holy God, is the dinner not ready? I've only twenty minutes you know, and it's no kind of weather for running after buses."

"The baby was troublesome," she said, "and I was delayed at the shops."

"You know I've only twenty minutes," he repeated. "Could you not have had the dinner ready in time to-day? It's bloody hot."

"The dinner is ready, if you'll only get yourself a plate and sit down to it."

He did so with bad grace and sat drumming his fingers on the table. Outside, the child's monotonous, high-pitched crying had caught the attention of the elderly woman who lived next door in the cool, white-painted serenity of a childless house. She was peering over the wall now, making clucking sounds which the child ignored, and every now and then casting disapproving looks at the house.

When the young woman came near the window, the other saw her and called, "I think he's too hot. You should take him in."

The mother went to the door resenting her neighbour's interference and hating the oblique and unanswerable criticism that would be poured on her when she reached the pram.

"Will you leave that damn kid alone and give me my dinner," her husband said. "Don't you know I've only twenty minutes and five of them are gone already. Do you want me to be late back at the office and have old Markey nagging me for the rest of the day? Give me whatever you have and let me get back."

She filled his plate with thick slices of meat and steaming forkfuls of cabbage and badly mashed potatoes and set it before him. The meal wasn't to his liking because he didn't bother with a knife, but morosely used his fork to pick out smaller pieces of the meat and vegetables. She could see that at the slightest provocation he would push the plate from him and accuse her in exaggerated terms of all kinds of neglect and indifference. To forestall him, she said, "Will you be home early to-night?"

"Amn't I always home early?"

"I was thinking we could go out somewhere."

"This is only Thursday. We're going out on Saturday, aren't we?"

"Yes, but I thought we might do something to-night."

"As well?" he asked.

"We're three years married to-day."

She knew by his expression that he had forgotten the anniversary and that he was annoyed at being reminded.

"I don't feel like going to the pictures," he said. "It'd be too damned hot."

"I was thinking we could go for a walk up the mountains," she said.

"In this weather?"

She came behind him and laid her cheek on top of his thinning hair.

"We could get the bus most of the way. It wouldn't be much of a walk to where we used to go. Ah, come on."

The suggestion seemed to embarrass him and he evaded the embrace he knew would follow by leaning forward ostensibly to gather another forkful of food.

"There'd be no one to mind the kid," he said, with his mouth full.

"You just don't want to go," she said.

"I never said any such thing. If you want to walk the feet off yourself, I don't care."

She bore the rebuff in silence, not because she was naturally submissive, but because she did not know how to answer him. Since the birth of the child, there had grown up between them reticence of his making that both puzzled and embarrassed her. It was as if he had grown ashamed of his early lovemaking and did not want to be reminded of their first months by any of the commonplace intimacies of marriage. His attitude, at times, made her feel abnormal, almost indecent.

She sat herself on his lap and folded her arms about his neck and took his ear between her teeth playfully.

"Go on," she said. "You're as cross as a bag of cats."

Her action might have evoked some response in him, but at that moment the elderly woman called stridently from the garden:

"The baby's getting sunstroke, I'm sure he is! Are you coming out to him?"

He pushed her roughly to her feet.

"Will you for the love of God go out and do something with the kid and stop that old one's screeching?"

He went out, flinging the door violently open.

"Your dinner," she called. "You haven't finished your dinner."

"Dinner? Dinner did you say? Who the hell could stomach corned beef and cabbage on a day like to-day?"

Before he had time to slam the hall door behind him, she ran up and caught his arm.

"I thought you'd like it. You always do. I'll get you something cold for your tea."

"I won't be in for tea," he said.

He would have said more but stopped when he saw two workmen lounging against the railings of the front garden. He shut the door in her face and hurried down the path.

When she went back to the kitchen, she could no longer hear the child crying and the elderly woman was gone. She might be lying in wait behind the wall or a window, however, and her outraged neighbourliness was not to be endured on top of everything else. The young woman sat on a hard chair and relaxed herself to cry, but she was too limply hot for any emotion. Flies circled the room or hung on the walls. The smell of cabbage water mingled heavily with that of gas seeping from the stove. Water



threw shimmering reflections on the ceiling. Heat stood like an enemy in the room.

When she could stand inaction no longer, she gathered up the plate containing the half-eaten meal on which the globules of running grease were quite uncongealed, and brought it to the sink. The sun stabbed her through the window and a wave of manlike sweat crept down her neck and back. She turned on the cold water tap and held her wrists under it, only to be deceived by its sparkling. The water was tamed and luke-warm, but it reminded her of the mountain river in Lourdes where she had one day washed her feet. There, the heat had its compensations; the nights were cold. She flushed again, embarrassed by the memory, took off her blouse and began to wash herself.

There was a refreshing smell from the carbolic soap that made her think of cool hospital corridors, so when the door to the garden opened, she ignored the sound, in order to prolong the sensation of vicarious coolness. Momentarily invigorated, she was not going to allow her husband to invade her tiny oasis of comfort, particularly if he had come back to apologise in his usual grudging way. She did not think it strange that he should have returned by the side entrance so soon after leaving; he had possibly forgotten his latch key in his angry departure.

The sound of a strange male voice, therefore, caught her completely unawares, and she whirled around, hands crossing themselves instinctively over her breast. The young workman was as embarrassed as she, but the broad humour of his kind brought a grin over his face. He dangled a blackened can in his hand.

"Could you give us the full of this of water, Miss?"

Her embarrassment struggled with outraged suburban propriety: she was more annoyed that he had trespassed on the privacy of her kitchen than on her personal privacy. She said, "How did you get in here? You'd no right to."

"I didn't like knocking on the front door, Miss. The side gate was open, so I came that way, but I didn't know—Sorry Miss, I'll ask next door."

She would have let him go, but two fears came into her mind; the bawdy description of the incident he would give his mates afterwards, and the possibility that he might go next door for the water and tell the elderly woman why he had been unsuccessful here.

"Give me your can," she said.

He stared at her with frank curiosity as she took it from him with both hands. Her determination not to give him any cause for later ribaldry overcame her embarrassment and she gave back his stare. He was tall and broad, and browned by the sun, with great arms covered to the elbows in reddish hair. Under a sweat-stained singlet, his pectoral muscles stood out square and strong. Little runnels of perspiration streaked the grey dust on his thick

neck. A warmth, not of the sun, suffused her. She said, "If you haven't a fire outside, I'll boil the water for you on the stove." She filled the can and placed it on the stove without donning her blouse beforehand.

She was arranging curling pins in her recently-washed hair when her husband returned. Her nails were newly varnished and the linen frock she wore was freshly ironed.

"Thank God it's a bit cooler," he said.

"Yes, it's quite nice now," she agreed.

"I was able to get home a bit earlier. Where's the child?"

"In bed."

"If you think he'll stay asleep, we'll go for that bit of a walk later on."

"To tell you the truth," she said, "I don't feel like going out now. Anyway, I think I'd better go to Confession. To-morrow is a First Friday."

PICTURE

IT IS THE DAY OF THE GREAT "PATTERN".

The gloom of the late autumn afternoon creates deep shadows in the kitchen of Flaherty's pub. Occasionally a spurt of flame from the fire lights up the dark forms of the overflow of men from the bar, who stand about in maudlin friendly groups, repeating and repeating banal trivialities, and calling in rough voices for more drink.

The low-ceilinged room reeks. It reeks with hot stagnant breath, with a fug of tobacco smoke, wood smoke: with damp sweat-saturated clothes and the fumes of stale soured drink.

Standing in the midst of the crowd of men is a slender little tinker girl, nine or ten years old. Her thin light-coloured dress cuts through the dun-coloured background like a searchlight, isolating her while emphasising her presence; making the more incongruous her sweet youth, her innocence, in such a setting.

"That was a great song you sang, girleen," breaks in one defined voice through the babel. "Have you e'er 'Slievenamon' now? If you can sing that for us I'll give you sixpence."

The child responds like an automaton. She tilts back her head and sings the plaintive song. Her thin pure clear voice, piercing the confused murmur, compels attention and brings a hush to the room for a few moments. The song comes to its end. There are grunts of approval and the hammerings of feet and sticks on the floor. She does not move from where she stands. Those about her fumble in their pockets and hand her coppers which, impassively and indifferently, she slips into the pocket of her dress. The raucous hubbub breaks out again and grows and regains possession of the room. The child is forgotten again and slips back into her apartness.

As attention drops away from her she withdraws her hand from her pocket. She slowly, carefully opens it and gazes raptly at its contents—a bright blue crumpled mass. Then, suddenly, apprehensively, as though she has heard some strange new sound above the rumble of the room she thrusts her treasure swiftly back again.

A red-haired woman slips sinuously round the door post and through the press of men. With the searching rapacious eyes of a weasel she surveys them as she leans up against the window ledge. As though her eyes were a magnet, with a glance, without a word, she draws the child over to her. Under the cover of her shawl she puts out her open hand and the child puts into it the coins from her own pocket.



The woman returns to her close scrutiny of the room. Across, on the settle, lolls a man, more than half asleep with drink. His coat is thrown open and from his waistcoat pocket protrudes a pound note. Furtively she nudges the child beside her, directing her attention, with her glance, to the sleeping man.

Slowly, discretely, the child works her way through the standing groups until she comes to the sleeping figure. Then unobtrusively, she sits down on the space on the settle beside him, awaiting an opportunity. A sudden explosion of laughter disturbs the sleeper and he sits up, blinking about him. He sees the child beside him and smiles. "You're the great little singer—a great little singer entirely. I must give you a penny for the song." He starts to fumble through his pockets and discovers the protruding note which he thrusts deeply and securely down. Then he finds a penny and gives it to the child.

She returns to the red-haired woman as slowly and nonchalantly as she came and hands her the penny. The woman catches the child's thin arm in her strong fingers, pinching it cruelly, leaving a red mark. The child winces and her small mouth tightens into a thin bitter line but she makes no sound.

The woman lights the butt of a cigarette and returns to her stealthy study of the crowded room. After a moment the child slips her hand again into her pocket and a smile comes to her face as slowly she withdraws the crumpled blue mass again and regards it eagerly. Then she lifts it to her lips, purses her cheeks and blows. The bright blue form of a balloon swells out and the child gazes at it with wide-eyed delight. For a moment she is enthralled with the wonder of it before she turns to the woman beside her, inviting her to share in her pleasure.

The woman turns her head. Slowly and deliberately she takes the cigarette from her mouth, blows out a stream of smoke and with cool casualness touches the bright balloon with the glowing tip. There is a sharp report, and the balloon released from the child's frightened fingers, falls in a heap onto the floor. The child's eyes well with tears. The little mouth is drawn again into the thin bitter line. But the tears have not time to form. The explosion has drawn the attention of the crowd to her again and one of them calls for another song. "Come girleen, 'tis time that you gave us 'I'm a rambler, I'm a gambler' again." The red-haired woman thrusts her violently and brusquely into the middle of the throng.

ROY McFADDEN

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## HONEYMOON

The sun came out to meet them that March day  
To give the city's freedom to their love  
(For lovers have the freedom of the world);  
And every window threw them flowers, and gay  
Girls in spring-bright dresses looked like flowers.  
O they brought spring to street and avenue  
And wakened buds and birds in every tree,  
And fashioned clocks of music from the hours.  
And hand in hand they walked the shining street  
And found the footprints of historic loves  
Before their own, and heard old songs between  
The bird cries and the skirling traffic's beat.  
Yes: they matched love against conspiracy  
Of history in that old town's guarded stones,  
And, matching manifestos of the heart  
Against the hustings of society,  
The naked self against the uniform,  
Heard the arrogant heart assert to head  
That only love, the smiling conjuror,  
Can steal a march on the remorseless worm.

So, sailing home one morning, with the sea  
Running to greet the hill-grey lough that swam  
Slowly before them, towing them to land,  
They faced their enemies, in love still free  
To live in spite of the majority.

SEAN J. WHITE

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## THE WITNESSES

I WAS ON MY LAST HAIL MARY. THERE WAS NO STIR YET OUT OF Duffy kneeling two seats in front of me.

"... world without end. Amen." I finished, genuflected hurriedly, and scuttled out.

Under swollen, stone-grey clouds, the November evening was darkening to an early close. Light, hazy rain was falling. The damp got into my eyes; it clouded the limp men and women circling around the door.

"You're a flyer Malone, boy," greeted Duffy, emerging. "How many is that now?"

"Twenty-three," I said, in an off-hand way.

"That's twenty for me," he said.

The Brother had appealed to us at school: "Remember the Holy Souls boys, on this, their special day. A single visit can release one soul from its pains." Duffy and I had taken it up, collecting ransomed souls as we collected birds' nests in April.

From the door we walked two steps abreast and took a slow, deliberate turn. The ritual marked the start of a new visit. In the fast-waning twilight of the church I could see many kneeling figures. There was a continual rattle of beads and shuffling foot-steps passed in and out. The sighing descent of the rain outside sounded a variation on the whisper of prayer that lapped the shadowy pillars.

It was difficult to imagine a Holy Soul. I pressed on my eyelids as I prayed. It might be like one of those green jelly spots rising before my eyes. In my prayer book there was a picture of a priest saying Mass at an altar and beneath the steps there was a heap of wriggling bodies. "Pray for the Suffering Souls" was printed underneath. As I built *Holy Mary* on *Our Father* the picture was before my mind. I strained my eyes to the top of the church; I could feel the tortured, burning throng beneath the steps. Already twenty-three shadows had floated upwards between the red lamp and the altar.

Duffy was out the door with me the next time and Shea followed close behind. It was almost dark now. The lamps on the gate pillars winked back at us from the wet pavement.

"You know, the Souls are supposed to walk to-night," remarked Shea as we returned to the shelter of the porch.

"Go on out of that Shea, you oul' molly," was Duffy's reply.

"Another yarn your oul' gran'mother in Limerick told you, on your holidays last Summer," I added.



"Alright, boy," Shea answered testily. "I betcha none of you would go down the graveyard tonight."

"Wouldn't we, boy? We're not afraid of your gran'mother's pishogues," Duffy said. I followed him into the church.

Frank Shea was still there in the porch when we came out again. He was talking to Foxy. Foxy was holding a bright new pair of scissors in one hand and a small trowel in the other.

"Are you taking up barbering, Foxy?" asked Duffy.

Foxy puckered his face as he surveyed his pair of tools.

"Crinney, I nearly forgot," he exclaimed. "My mother sent me to cut the grass on my granda's grave and weed the gravel."

"Isn't it late you thought of it," said Duffy.

"Sure she sent me two hours ago but I stopped down at Kearney's the whole evening."

"Were they killing?" I asked.

"They were—two cattle. Lord, you missed the gas. One oul' cow broke away and we chased her all over the place. They had to tie her with two ropes. Japers, such gallery. The Butcher Doolan let me sweep out the blood into the gutter . . . and he gave me the bladder for doing it."

"Give us a look Foxy," we all chorused.

Foxy unrolled the gluey membrane from the hem of his jersey. With affected disregard for our admiration he wiped his mouth with his sleeve; he blew up the bladder slowly and painfully. We watched it swell with tightening chests. Then Foxy stopped. He let the air burst out with a squeal.

"Look lads I'll be skinned if I don't do this oul' grave. 'One of you come on down with me.'"

We looked at each other. Shea's eyes held a challenge.

"It's too dark," Duffy said, "you could hardly find the grave."

"Ah, come on. We'll only be a few minutes; I'll just give the grass a clip. She'll beat me black and blue if I don't do it."

"Now, Duffy, where's all your big talk?" said Shea.

"You shut your gob Shea," blustered Duffy. "I won't go till I get even with Malone on the visits."

"How many have you done?" asked Foxy.

"Twenty-two, and he has twenty-five."

"Ah, you'll be all night . . . if I don't go now it will be too dark. What about yourself Malone? The hard man Malone. Come on, be a sport."

In this way I was inveigled into accompanying Foxy on his grave-trimming expedition. There was a little light in the sky, low down in the west, but when we passed into the graveyard it was obscured by a row of yew trees. A slight irregular breeze had arisen; raindrops from the shivering branches were slapping the ground. Our shoes squelched in the sodden sand of the path.

"It's across here somewhere," said Foxy, quietly, as he left the path and struck off across the graves.

We stumbled across twisted, wet grass, over grave mounds

and stone copings. My socks were being soaked. I wished myself back in the church. The sigh of the breeze in the yews, the sudden cataract of raindrops, the sullen damp of the tombstones; all conspired to sap my confidence.

"Here we are," called Foxy. He stooped down beside a large cypress tree.

While Foxy went to work, I stood peering into the dusk. There was a muffled clip-clip from the scissors as it cut sickeningly into the rank grass.

"This wet stuff is a beggar to cut."

To relieve the pins and needles feeling under my hair and to vindicate my manliness I began to walk about. I stepped out on the path and rounded the cypress tree. It was tossing and shaking itself; beating off the breeze with flailing arms. Its lower branches swept the path and slapped damply against my knees. Completing the circle, I took to the grass again and had hardly gone three steps when my boot hit something with a clink. There were two circular shapes, mourning wreaths of waxen flowers enclosed in glass. They snuggled in the grass like black mushrooms. The restless wind was moving something in my head. I ran my hand over the moist surface of the nearest one. There was a large jagged opening in the glass.

It was the wreath I broke last Holy Thursday. After High Mass, Duffy, Foxy and I had wandered into the graveyard. We threw stones at a cockshot for a while and then we split up into two teams to croost each other. Duffy was behind the big tree and I let fly at him. A splintering of glass brought us around to see the damage. I had smashed one of the wreaths on old Luke Rooney's grave. "From his heartbroken sister Elizabeth," the faded card dangling from the aperture said. The boys were for me. Luke Rooney was never a favourite of ours.

I moved around the tree and found Foxy still at work.

"This oul' scissors wouldn't cut butter," he complained as he gropingly hacked at the grass.

The rain was becoming heavier and the wind was rising. The branches were cracking and swishing.

"Are ye nearly finished, Foxy?"

"In a jiff now. I have the oul' fellah nearly shaved."

My mind began to run on Luke Rooney. His tall, stooping figure and crippled walk, his bright sunken eyes, pale face and white fungus of moustache were burning memories of my childhood. He used to live in a little thatched house near the bridge. Often we used his garden and paddock as a shortcut to the river. His rage at the trespass attracted us to this path. Crouched in the ivy of his garden wall I anxiously watched his passage across the stony yard; the short step and simultaneous tap of the stick; then the long drag of his paralysed right leg. If he knew it was I who smashed his wreath . . . the picture of his rage was too terrible. The day he caught me annoying his old bantam there

was a pink light in his eyes.

"Are you coming Foxy?"

"Just now. A small piece off the top, sir."

Would Luke Rooney be one of the Holy Souls? Shea said they walked tonight. That rain was going through me. A pure spirit wearing Luke's shapeless, gamekeeper's hat and carrying a twisted blackthorn was pushing in among my thoughts.

"Ah, Foxy, come on out of that."

"I'll be with you now. You're in a fierce hurry."

The cypress branches were rattling. Through their noise I sensed something else. My heart missed a step, sending a shock down my back. It was a familiar sound: a beat rather than a sound. There it was again . . . a step . . . tap. I knew what was coming next. It came . . . a slow scraping drag.

Now it had started again . . . step . . . tap—the sound was muffled: must be distant yet—then the painful straining limp. I relaxed with a shiver; my body was liquid now. There was a pause and then it came again . . . clip . . . tap . . . scrape. He must be walking slowly; the white moustache falling and rising with the laboured breath. Was he wearing a hat? I couldn't look to see. For the world I couldn't turn but I knew he was coming nearer and nearer, for the triple beat was getting louder and more frequent.

"Foxy! I'm going."

The clipping stopped but the wind still blew and bore the nearing steps and taps. Three steady paces I took and then began to run. I ran jerkily, stumbling and falling, my direction haphazard. A light from the church drew me. I raced for it.

Outside the graveyard I slowed to a quick walking pace. I did not look behind me. Foxy's running footsteps caught me up.

"Con, you're as white as a sheet."

In broken, short-breathed sentences I told what I had heard. After a look into the graveyard he turned and walked beside me.

"'Twas only the branches hitting in the wind," he said, "or scraping against the path."

It may have been that but the prospect of hearing those steps again even in a dream paralysed me. The sound of my own footsteps echoing on the cement as we walked around the church made me tingle. I expected to hear them drag.

In the light of the main door we saw people walking in and out. There was no sign of Duffy or Shea.

"Gone to their tea," said Foxy. "I'll save one before I go to mine."

He held the heavy swing-door for me.

The souls under the altar-steps were no longer a confused, anonymous crowd. There was a tall one in the middle in a battered tweed hat with a blackthorn stick. He made the rest seem familiar.

On my beads I began the six *Our Fathers*.



## THE CAT AND THE CORNFIELD

IN IRELAND ALL YOU NEED TO MAKE A STORY IS TWO MEN WITH completed characters—say a parish priest and his clerk. There at once you have conflict. When, as a foil for the pious clerk, you throw in a mature tinker girl, wild and lissom, the love interest is provided in addition to the conflict. And when finally for good measure you supply a snow-white cat, a cornfield and a shrewish woman who asks three questions, the components if properly assembled should at the very least provide a moderate tale.

The scene is laid in a tiny village drowsing on a summer hill and the hour of the day is mid-morning. The village is composed of a church that lacks a steeple, a pair of pubs—one thatched and the other slated, with maybe a dozen higgledy-piggledy houses equally apportioned between thatch and slate. The gaps in the houses yield glimpses of well-foliaged trees beyond which is the countryside falling away into loamy fields on all sides.

On the morning of our story, the parish clerk, a grumpy fellow of middle age with small irregular red features, by the name of Denny Furey, was sweeping out the brown flags of the chapel porch. He was dressed in the cast-off black of a dead parish priest; his black hāt was hanging from a nail beside the holy water stoup. In the presence of the public it had always been the privilege of the parish priest to bully the clerk; when the pair were alone the clerk invariably extracted his revenge. On Saturday night when the parish priest took his seat in a zinc bath in front of the open fire and the clerk poured in boiling water from a large iron kettle, the pair could be heard arguing: "Do you want to scald me alive, you blackguard?" or the clerk's reply, "Stop steady, will you? You're like a hen on a hot griddle!"

Having brushed the porch the clerk took up the wire mat at the door of the chapel and tried to shake three pebbles out of it. The pebbles were tenacious and tantalizing. The clerk grew angry with them and also with the priest who had approved of this new-fangled type of mat, advancing the plea that at all costs they should be modern in their ideas.

At the sound of the rattling pebbles, the clerk's loyal white cat, who was sitting on the sunny wall of the church beside the clerk's cabin, looked up and mewed soundlessly out of his corrugated biscuit-coloured mouth. The cat—he had green pale eyes and a nose with a single blotch at the end of it—was called Pangur Bán: the priest had named him for a cat in one of the oldest

Gaelic poems extant which was said to have been written by a mediaeval scribe working in his beehive cell:

*Myself and Pangur Bán my cat  
Similar tasks we are at.  
Stalking mice is his delight  
Stalking verbs I spend the night.*

Pangur Bán's loyalty could at times prove embarrassing to his master: his crouched presence on the window of the local tavern late at night could inform the priest out for a late airing that his clerk was still sipping beer. But the clerk forgave Pangur Bán for his misguided loyalty and each night he made a nest of his empty breeches beside the bed; in this nest the cat slept, for which repose Denny's shanks were truly thankful on cool mornings.

In the midst of Denny Furey's endeavours to dislodge the pebbles there came a merry sun-muted sound of harness bells. A tinker's spring cart, painted bright green and blue with a shaggy piebald cob harnessed to it, drew slowly past the chapel. The daisied earth of the lawn came almost level with the crenellations of the wall between it and the road. Sitting on the wide wing of the spring cart was a young tinker girl wearing a tartan shoulder-shawl. Eighteen, perhaps; more likely, nineteen. She had wild fair hair and a clean complexion. Her bright clothes indicated the magpie nature of her mind. Her roving eye became filled with gaming as she spied the parish clerk wrestling with the chapel mat.

Seeing her, Denny began to grimace ill-temperedly. His first reaction was to turn his back on her. Then he found himself impelled by an innocent curiosity to learn whether or not the girl would cut the Sign of the Cross on herself whilst jogging past the chapel gateway. This she did the instant the clerk's eye lighted upon her. Denny grunted his satisfaction. Then, just beyond the gateway, the pony's lazy motion came to a halt. Denny threw down the rat-trap of a mat. The girl was watching him. He was tempted for a moment to shout, "Shoo! Shoo! Be off! I'm the parish clerk! Next to the priest I'm greatly to be feared! Be off with yourself at once, I say!"

And then he couldn't help thinking, "Eighteen or more likely nineteen is reckoned old for a tinker girl to be still on her own."

Pangur Bán looked at the girl, then raised himself on white shuddering legs and gently arched his back, while from his pink mouth a gracious but soundless mew of welcome was sent in her direction.

"That you may be lucky, master!" the tinker girl said. Not begging she was, just blessing. Or . . . was it blessing? The parish clerk did not venture to reply.

"Your wife—have she e'er an old pair of shoes, master?"

"Wife! Wife!" Denny exclaimed sharply, "I've no wife!"

Smilingly, he took the query as a compliment to his freshness.

Wheeling away, he cocked his head sideways like a fox terrier. On many occasions he had tried to imagine what it would mean to have a woman in his cottage. But then he thought that perhaps, if he got married, the white cat would never again squat on the public house window. So each time it arose he firmly set the temptation of married life aside.

The tinker girl continued to watch the clerk.

Now or never was Denny's time to shoo her away. But as he turned to view her, her barely bridled eyes began to cry out at him. After staring at him coolly for a moment or so, she turned her head to look at his thatched cabin where it crouched at the left of the chapel gate.

Denny fussed about on the flagged chapel pathway. Loudly he knocked the end of the brush-head against the flags. He seemed anxious to tell the girl through loud noises, "How dare you glance away when the Parish Clerk looks in your direction?"

For all his antics the tinker girl was sitting motionless on her cart. Her very manner of waiting was indicative of concealed amusement. At last she condescended to look at him much as a mature woman would glance at the pleading-for-praise antics of a small boy.

Inconsequently, Denny shouted, "Nothin' for you today!"

The girl took her own time about replying. Then, "I want nothin' from you, master," she said softly. She did not draw upon the reins.

Now was Denny's second opportunity to say, "Be off!" Somehow the words refused to come. On a sudden thought he set his brush against the church wall and looked fully at her. She answered his eyes with frankness. They kept looking at one another for a long time.

She saw in him the never-ending adventure of safeness and respectability and security, of being a person of importance at the crisis in the lives of country people—of being powerful at weddings, at births and at deaths; of being conversant with the wonder that was the Latin language, of having the first and last of the whisky, of being able to speak up valiantly even to the teeth of the priest of the parish himself.

In the tinker woman the clerk sensed the adventure and wild delight of fairs and patterans, of curragh races and carousing and fighting and the unfettered singing of ballads.

He and she struggled to express through trembling thoughts the realisation that each was complementary to the other.

The daring pact was readily sealed with their eyes. Denny donned his hat and as on a drowsy impulse walked slowly towards the chapel gate. To the clerk's ears lost rosaries clinked with unnecessary loudness and the hinges squeaked unfairly as the gate yielded to his hands. The sunlit village was sound asleep. The green shield of Ireland was prone below the summer hillock.

Pangur Bán had curled himself for sleep on the worn warm



wall.

An unwonted tenderness glossed Denny's voice as he enquired, "Where are you headin' for?" Slowly the white gate latched shut behind him.

Before replying the tinker girl smiled. Then speaking quietly, looking at the white road ahead of her, she said, "Wherever the cob carries me." The smile faded slowly as her gaze swivelled to the whitewashed cabin at the right of the chapel gate. "Is that your house?" she asked, and again, "Is that your cat?"

"Aye! . . . Aye!"

The girl looked long at the little house with its tiny deeply recessed windows. She noted well the dark green half-door and over it the full door that had the stylish vagary of a shining brass latch marking it as the dwelling of a person of local importance.

The village continued to remain sound asleep.

"Do you never tire of the road?" Denny asked.

"Do you never tire of bein' fettered, master?" the girl flashed quickly at him, at the same time tossing a lock of her hair from off her forehead.

They both sighed fully and deeply. Under the black hat Denny's eye had begun to smoulder.

As the girl secretly dragged on the rein, the cob shifted from one leg to another. This movement afforded her an alibi to utter an exclamation of annoyance. Her red and green skirt made a wheel of provocation as she leaped from the vehicle and advanced to make some obscure adjustment to the harness. As she headed for the open roadway her surety of carriage postulated that she knew that the clerk must follow. Uproad stood a hissing gander with his flock of geese serried behind him.

"The weather is better than gold!" Denny said lamely in the hope that she would dally.

The girl did not reply. She prepared to lead her animal away. At the last moment of utter departure the clerk blurted as if conferring a desperate favour, "Hey, I'll convey you apass the gander!" The voice of his instinct had told Denny that all a woman needed in such a crisis was an excuse.

Still the tinker girl made no reply. Standing well away from the vehicle she began to make a great to-do about gathering up the reins and adjusting her shawl. Adroitly Denny moved to the far side of the road where he could speedily disown her if the necessity arose. Walking thus, apart yet together, they went out of the village and stepped downhill. Once the clerk glanced fearfully over his shoulder; the village was not so much asleep as stone dead.

The white road developed a wry neck and twisted away to where the houses and the hillock over them were unseen. The cob, a hairy, bony animal, moved smartly on the declivity so that Denny had to step it out bright and lively to keep up with the girl and her animal.

The splendour of the summer accompanied the pair. The countryside was a silver shield inclining to mid-day gold. Their footfalls were muted in the white limestone road dust. Muted also was the noise of the horse's unshod hooves. The harness, gauded as it was with a prodigious weight of brass mountings, had begun to wink furiously under the loud light. At last they came to where the road ran between level fields below. Here Denny looked over his shoulder and saw Pangur Bán fifty yards behind him walking stealthily on the road margin.

The parish clerk gave a sudden exclamation of annoyance. "Be off! Be off!" he shouted sternly at the cat.

Pangur Bán paused to utter a soundless mew. He then resumed the placing of two soft white clean paws in their accurate sequence. His down-drooping tail was a dead weight behind him. The brown wen on his white nose continued to precede him. Now and again the pink corrugated mouth-roof submitted itself to the scrutiny of a heedless world.

The girl smiled. Accompanied by the jingle of the harness they walked on. On a sudden thought Denny again turned. His angry face was red and suffused with blood. "Be off with you, you Judas!" he shouted. Stooping down he picked up a stone and flung it fully at the cat.

The instant the stone left the clerk's hand, Pangur judged that it was going to miss him. So he remained utterly without movement. When the stone had gone singing away into silence the cat went over and smelled at a piece of road metal the bounding stone had disturbed. There was no smell of man from the metal. The white cat mewed his mystification into the cloudless sky; then passed faithfully on.

The road, a second time, unpredictably twisted until it commanded and was commanded by the road entrance to the village on the hillock.

The tinker and the clerk had now reached a point where, in a cornfield on the left hand side of the road, the ripening corn was green and olive and gold. The field was a small treasure-house of sunlight with its span open to swallow the goodness of the southern sky. Directly beside their boots was the temptation of a gap descending to the sown ground below. The cob, as if dully conscious of their dilemma, stopped here and began to crop the grass of the roadside.

"The corn is swingin' into ripeness!" the clerk said. The girl halted and looked at the cornfield.

"Let us sit in the sun," the parish clerk then ventured, at the same time diffidently indicating the remote corner of the field below. He dared not say more lest his voice should break off into nervous flakes.

The girl smiled her dreamy acquiescence. With slow movements that seemed to postulate that she had all the time in the world at her disposal she tied her cob to the butt of a whitethorn

bush. Then the pair walked by the side of the cornfield and demurely took their seats on the grassy edge of the farthest headland. Here the corn screened them from the view of a person passing on the road. The fierceness and lushness of growth in this sun-trap had rendered the hedge behind them impenetrable. With rare bravery Denny at last took the girl's hand in his and began to fondle it modishly. As he did so he kept his face averted. Clerk and tinker seemed wholly content with one another's company. The sun beat upon them and drew frost-points of sweat from Denny's agitated face.

Twice already, from the top of the grassy fence, Pangur Bán had stretched out an exploratory foreleg in the essay of a descent into the hot cornfield. On each occasion concealed thistles and thorns tipping his pads dissuaded him from leaping. Ruefully the cat eyed the cropping horse, then turned to mew his upbraidings into the conversing wheat. Receiving no satisfaction therefrom he settled himself patiently to wait.

Pangur Bán sat with his generous tail curled around his front paws. His eyes were reluctant to open before the sunlight. On the infrequent occasions that they did so there was visible in each globe of green eye a slim upended oval of dark pupil. Whenever the eyes were fully closed the ears continued to sift the natural sounds of the day. One ear possessed a notable facility of moving and focusing and flattening whilst the other remained utterly still. At times the ears were flattened backwards on the cat's poll before the onset of a small breeze.

Reading his office, the huge old priest walked the village. Glancing up from his breviary he noticed the brush idle against the chapel wall; his sharp eyes also spied the wire mat which was almost concealed on the lawn grass. The impudent valour of the gander the priest demolished with a stern wave of his blackthorn stick. Then standing in the road directly opposite the doorway of Denny's cabin, he sang out sharply, "Denny! Denny!"

Receiving no reply he shuffled to the chapel door and again trumpeted vainly for his clerk. At last with an angry, if not renunciatory, shrug of his shoulders the priest strolled downhill and out into the open country.

After he had walked for a while he could not help observing the blaze that was the brown and white pony and later still the flame that was the cat where it burned motionlessly beside the olive dropcloth of the cornfield.

Straight away the old man's face became crinkled against sunlight and puzzlement both. With clarity he recalled having heard some short time before the irate voice of his housekeeper raised to chase a young female tinker out of the presbytery kitchen.

"Away with you, girl," Old Nonie had shouted. "Fitter for you to do an honest day's work instead of stravagin' idly on the Irish roads!"

The priest's grunt indicated that he was versed in deduction.



With a gait calculated to deceive a possible observer he began to slouch in the direction of the white target. His blackthorn stick was firmly imprisoned in his left armpit. From time to time his eyes strayed over the gilt edging and the coloured markers of his holy book.

Denny glanced up from his sober love-making.

"Divine God!" he exclaimed on seeing the black bulk approaching on the roadway above.

The clerk was inexplicably minded to cry. Meanwhile the girl was lying back on the grass: her posture had curved a swath of rich green hay to taut silver. She was smiling up at the sky as she spaced her clean small teeth along a grass stem.

Reaching the cat the priest halted. "Pangur! Pangur Bán!" he wheedled out of his mouth corner, the while his eyes roved over the cornfield. On hearing the known and loved voice, the cat tilted his exploratory back against the lower may leaves, set his four paws all together and then vouchsafed himself to droop for a bout of languid gaiety.

For a moment or two the priest tricked with the cat. Then he straightened his back. "To think that I don't see you, Denny Furey!" he clarified into the cornfield.

Denny and the girl were prone and without movement. His agonised face was close to hers. About them the minute living world asserted itself in the snip of grasshoppers and in the tremulous love-making of unseen birds.

Again the priest thundered, "Nice example for a parish clerk!"

Slowly the sweat beaded above Denny's eyebrows; one resolute drop gathered itself and sliding over the bridge of his nose raced into the volute of his right nostril. Despite the heat of the day the clerk's thighs had begun to shiver in the breeches his cat slept in. The girl's mouth was fully quizzical. She was able to see the priest through the altering lattice of the corn-heads, yet she failed to understand her companion's extreme agitation. Her own parish was a Province and that was a full quarter of Ireland. Allegiance and respect she owed only to the traveller's priest and he was well out of earshot a hundred miles away.

From the roadway came again the voice of retribution, "If it's the last thing I do, Denny Furey, I'll strip you of your black coat!"

It was this very moment that a shrewish woman wearing a black and green shawl chose to thrust around the bend of the road as she headed resolutely for the village. This woman's interest in other people's affairs had kept her body lean and wiry. Long since spring green and summer red and even such loveliness as a cornfield in balance between two colours had ceased to possess an urgent message to her.

Catching sight of the woman approaching, the priest quickly turned his face away from the cornfield and began to pace towards her along the road. He buried his face in his breviary and his

lips began to move to the Latin.

When he had recognised who it was now on the scene Denny Furey first swore softly to himself and then began to cry without let. "The parish will be ringing with the news before dark!" he complained through his tears.

The girl beside him was smiling in sureness and in silence.

Drawing closer the newcomer first blessed the priest so as to break him from his Office then in an eager voice that expressed threadbare concern she enquired, "Father, was it a thing I heard your voice raised?"

The priest lowered his shaggy eyebrows a full inch. Then, "Sermons don't sprout on bushes, my daughter," he said harshly.

"Ah!" the woman breathed, "practisin' you were!" Then as her crafty darting eyes alighted on the white cat, "Would it be bird-chasin' the clerk's cat is?"

The conversation of the wheat-spars was only one step above silence. The priest's eyes were like two old trout living side by side in a boggy stream.

Sagely the priest commented, looking fully at Pangur Bán as if seeing him for the first time, "It could be, woman, now that you mention it."

Pangur kept his eyes blissfully closed. He was utterly innocent of his intrinsic espionage.

The woman's third question came close to the bone. After prudently examining the cornfield and then flicking the spring cart with a single glance, she said, as if whispering in a crowded house, "People say, Father, that tinker girls'd pick the very eye out of your head!"

This statement was akin to a darning needle driven home in a vulnerable part of the priest. The elasticity of his natural wince caused his voice to bound fully forward into denunciation.

"Did you ever hear tell of the virtue of charity, woman?" he growled.

The woman made her crumbled excuses which it suited the priest not to accept. Hurriedly she walked away but not without an odd backward baffled glance. The priest stood angrily in mid-road ready to cannonade after her on the smallest provocation. Resentment and disappointment were implicit in the puffs of road dust that spouted venomously from under her toecaps. Before the village swallowed her up she had the hardihood to look over her shoulder. The priest was standing still waiting to parry this backward glance.

For a little while the priest continued to eye the innocent cornfield. Then with a sound that was half grunt, half chuckle, he untied the cob and, leading it by the head, turned away in the direction of the village.

The instant the harness began to clash and the bell to rumble there was a moment of hesitation in the world. Then the tinker girl sprang to her feet and began to race wildly along the edge of

the cornfield. "Father! Father!" she cried out. Despite the rough ground she raced upon, her shoes were sureness itself.

The priest came to a tolerant halt. The breathless girl stopped well out of range of his stick. "So I've drawn you at last, my vixen!" the priest said.

In the midst of her rage and concern the girl found time to bob a half-curtsy. As again the priest turned to head the beast away, she turned berserk.

"What're you goin' to do with my animal, Father?" she shouted after him. With tinkers an animal and a cart are a treasure beyond treasures.

"Impounding him I am—unless you get that clerk o' mine out o' the cornfield at once."

The girl turned her wild eyes this way and that. Then, leaping on to the low fence, "Come out o' the cornfield, Parish Clerk," she shouted, "I want to recover my animal!"

After a while Denny shuffled to his feet. The cat stood up and mewed his master loyal greetings across the whispering corn.

The priest stood motionless at the animal's head. His dark old suit was set against the glitter of the harness. The angry girl stood on the fence, her arms akimbo: the anger that had been turned against the priest was now fully directed against the parish clerk. Scrambling dismally, Denny came up the road. Watching him out of cowed eyes, the word "hangdog" occurred with accuracy to the priest.

The girl again measured the firmness of the hand upon the ring of her cob's winkers. When Denny had come up she came to an informer's decision for she then blurted out in a high-pitched voice, "I was goin' my road, Father, when he coaxed me into the cornfield!"

Instinctively Denny opened his mouth for denial. Then his face assumed the attitude it always took prior to tears. He began to blink his moist eyes. He still kept his distance from the vanished stick that menaced him with its cream-coloured knobs and battered brass ferule. Slowly his mouth closed fast for he was too dejected even to rally to his own defence. Nothing seemed to matter now. Pangur Bán was rubbing himself resolutely against the end of his beloved breeches. The clerk quickly gave the cat the side of his long boot and sent him careering fully five feet into the bushes.

"*A chait*, ou'r that!" he said, with a spurt of desperate courage.

The priest said loudly, "Aha, you scoundrel, can you do no better than abuse a dumb animal!"

Again the clerk drooped to the brink of desperation. Blinking furiously he turned his face to the cornfield. The cat had recovered himself in the long grass and was licking himself perplexedly.

Turning to the girl, the priest said, "Take your animal! And



if I catch you in this village again, by the Holy Man above us both, I'll give you the length and breadth of my blackthorn!"

Boldly enough, now that she had taken full stock of the wryness of the situation, the girl taunted uprighteously, "He said he'd convey me apass the gander, Father!"

She made several lunges forward before she mustered the courage to grasp the winkers. Once indeed her buttocks winced away as she feared a blow about to fall. Then as she swung the pony downroad she continued to use the vehicle as a shield. When she had gained a few yards she leaped lightly on to the broad board on the side of the cart and slashed angrily at the pony's rump with the free dangle of the reins.

The vehicle softly rumbled and rang its way in the direction of the open country.

The priest, the clerk, the cat. The cornfield trapping all the sunlight the while its wheat-spars rustled.

"Come on, me bucko!" the priest said grimly.

He began to walk home. The clerk trailed after his master, a yard or two behind. Glory was gone out of his life and in him moroseness was king. The wonderful day seemed to have been created solely for his mockery. The future was a known road stretching before his leaden legs. What he had thought would prove a pleasant bauble in his life had turned to a crown of thorns. In the past whenever he had chafed against the uneventful nature of his existence always he had consoled himself thus, "One day, perhaps today, I'll run and buy me a hoop of bright colours."

Revelling in his misery he began to compare his soul to a pebble trapped in a wire mat of despair.

After the priest's anger had subsided, he gradually became infected with his clerk's moroseness. Side by side they continued to move homewards. From between the faraway fields the sound of the harness bell was a recessional song of adventure diminishing into dusty distances.

Behind the priest and the clerk and at a discreet distance Pangur Bán travelled quietly. The white cat was undeflected by the soft wing-thrummings in mid-bushes. He continued to follow after the pair in accurate midsummer spurts. Now and again he paused to mew his loyalty into the sunny world.

## BOOK REVIEWS

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### A FIRST BIOGRAPHY

DR. E. Æ. SOMERVILLE, BY GERALDINE CUMMINS. (*Andrew Dakers*, 21/-).

Mr. Lennox Robinson in his preface to Miss Geraldine Cummins' biography of Dr. E. Æ. Somerville speaks of Dr. Somerville's place in the Irish Renaissance and her place among women writers. But I see writers as very lonely, and separated far from one another as stars, though in this case as a binary star, which is one of two that revolve round each other. How rare in the heavens binary stars may be I do not know, but such collaborations as that fortunate one which produced *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.* are very rare indeed on earth. As for her place among women writers, that is quite beside the point. No book of the quality of the *Irish R.M.* is in the very least like any book by any other writer. The particles in the tail of a comet closely resemble each other, but every comet is different from every other comet and sails on a separate orbit. And so it is with writers; any one of a school of writers closely resembles the next one, because they all copy the writer they follow, but they are none of them writers that the world will remember, for none of these go about in schools. Dr. Somerville and Miss Martin, like all great writers, are unique. And so a study of them such as Miss Geraldine Cummins gives us is of the interest that the study of some branch of science or art would be, or of a whole genus of some fauna.

And I am glad to see Miss Cummins defend their Irish nationality against some who said that, being Anglo-Irish, they were not truly Irish people. It is not that Somerville and Ross, any more than the shamrock, have any need for their nationality to be defended, but that this defence of it may prevent such ideas from spreading, and perhaps causing trouble in England between the Jutes and the Angles, and even leading to a demand for their expulsion from land that is obviously the property of the British, just as Ireland rightfully belongs to the Firbolgs, who were so shockingly invaded by the Milesians and the Tuatha de Dan-aan.

Miss Cummins writes "It is significant that the two Irish cousins did not frequent literary circles in Dublin or London, but passed their lives in their native counties, Galway and Cork." And I think it is indeed of great significance. It is not that the Abbey Theatre is untrue to life, but that far from literary circles their material was raw Irish life, and differed from what they would have got in any town, as milk and fruit and vegetables that you

get in the country differ from any you may find in the great markets. *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.* is more than a good book, it is a piece of Ireland preserved, which time would have otherwise taken away, or rather which time would have harmed as much as it can, for I believe that races do not change, however much they may alter their dress, so that time cannot do much to them. It will be of great interest to those who loved the books that they wrote, to learn from this book how they came to write them, how they first met, and how together they gathered up the beauty of the land in which they lived and over which they hunted, and the whimsical charm of the people that dwell in that land. Others have gathered and tried to preserve that charm and that beauty; but who has done it better than Somerville and Ross?

Reviewers do not always read the whole of a book, or ever confess that they don't; yet, when I came to one of those episodes but for which Ireland might claim to be an earthly paradise, the death of Dr. Somerville's brother, I could not bear to read any further. Miss Cummins writes bravely of this, giving a horrid deed its correct and horrid name, so that it is for no fault of hers that I closed the book, but only because of a reluctance of mine to see such shadows darkening so fair a land.

LORD DUNSANY.

## A KERRYMAN'S SAGA

HOSTAGE TO FORTUNE, BY JOSEPH O'CONNOR. (*Michael F. Moynihan Co., Dublin, 18/-*).

These episodic reminiscences of a septuagenarian Kerryman are for the most part written in the form of short stories, and were apparently not originally intended for publication. The author disarmingly confesses that they were set down "as a pleasant and slightly profitable palliative for the incurable ailment . . . old age", and a reviewer must at once admit that among these chapters are pleasant, amusing, tender memories and stories. There are also, and as one would expect, some not so amusing, long-winded anecdotes and a few memories gone astray.

Obviously, however, something different was intended. The publisher claims the book "One of the very great Irish autobiographies of our time", and in his early chapters the author is all set to write autobiography. Somewhere about the middle of the book the life-story falters and the anecdotes crowd in. It is difficult not to believe that the latter half was written at a much later date, and that the earlier pages are a separate unfinished story of boyhood.

The Sussex-born boy, son of a British soldier who retired from the army and returned with his family to his native Kerry in the 1880's, finds himself in Listowel, at the age of nine. In front of the Bridewell he sees a force of British troops standing to



attention with drawn bayonets. "The familiar red coats warmed my heart. They were a bit of Lincoln in Listowel. I wanted to run across to them and make friends, but Grandpa caught my hand. 'Do you want to draw the ruffians on top of us?'"

The commentary in these early pages is that of the wiser, more-prejudiced but still enthusiastic old man but the experience is that of the observant, intelligent and sometimes cruel boy. One's interest is aroused and one looks forward to a deepening of expression and of experience as the story unfolds.

The boy goes to Maynooth, a student for the priesthood, realises that he has mistaken his vocation and the narrative begins to glow as his self-questioning is dramatically set against the doubts of a fellow-student. About this point the book inexplicably changes direction. The author's family disappears from the story, and thereafter it ambles along, pleasantly discursive with no unifying thread, either of plot or of character, till it comes to what the author is pleased to term "Cessation". The title is, I take it, from Francis Bacon's *Of Marriage and Single Life*. The quotation might have been set out in full on the title-page: "He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or mischief".

P. J. MADDEN.

FROZEN GROUND, BY NORAH HOULT. (*Heinemann*, 12/6).

THE BOGMAN, BY WALTER MACKEN. (*Macmillan*, 12/6).

THE LOST NIGHTINGALE, BY J. H. POLLOCK. (*Carter Publications, Belfast*, 7/6).

In *Frozen Ground*, by Norah Hoult, the unheroic background of middleclass, provincial English life, with its absence of either want or plenty, its moral shabbiness, throws its own grey chill on the atmosphere of the story. A due effect since the time is the second decade of this century, the theme, the gradual icing-up of the warm impulses of a young girl's heart under the shocks of orphanhood, adoption and, generally, a childhood deprived of family security and love.

Monica Lake as child and schoolgirl; the other characters and their relations with her, are all admirably realised. One can at once understand the child's unresponsiveness to her hearty guardian's overtures of affection, and sympathise with the latter's disappointment when Monica obstinately refuses to be her dream-child.

It is cavilling to sigh for the summer lightning of Elizabeth Bowen's sensibility and wit playing over a somewhat similar theme in *The Death of the Heart*. Norah Hoult's firm realism, charged with pity, does not dissipate these North-of-England fogs, but she uncovers with sympathy the lives they enshroud and the result is quietly distinguished.

After the monochrome of *Frozen Ground*, *The Bogman*, by Walter Macken, has the impact of an Irish Tourist Association poster, with outsize figures caught in dramatic attitudes against a background of field and bogland and small white cabins.

When Cahal Kinsella returns from the Industrial School to the village of Caherlo, he has a child's heart, a warm hope, a deep well of good-humoured patience in his character and a happy song bubbling up on his lips. When he has to fly from the village fifteen years later none of these remains but the song, and that now bitterly satirical. In between? An unsophisticated soul expertly explored and revealed, much of Irish rural life and character. Walter Macken has achieved a highly successful fusion of his material and methods, though the methods are sometimes unconventional. His work is characterised by enormous vitality. If *The Bogman* publicises some of the realities of Irish rural life usually ignored by the sentimentalists—the countryman's greed, cruelty, bawdiness; the unnatural marriages that have had as much to do with depopulating the countryside as the glamour of city lights—its essentially picaresque character should prevent anyone from mistaking it for a 'document'. Harsher in tone, and not altogether as credible in plot as *Rain on the Wind*, it is yet a worthy addition to this writer's lengthening list of successful novels.

A loving attention to the characters and to the topographical details of the background—Wicklow at the time of the Elizabethan plantations—distinguishes *The Lost Nightingale*, by J. H. Pollock. This solicitude is proper when the characters include Sir Walter Raleigh, Edmund Spenser, John Dowland and Angus O'Daly, the Irish Bard.

It is a story of the Pale, even of a section of the Pale. Gaels and Anglo-Normans appear only as the rather sinister shadows of a disappearing order of things. The O'Byrnes holding out at Ballinacor, the defeat of the Queen's Deputy at Glenmalur are not quite ignored, but, within the framework of this love-story of a planter's daughter, they do not matter. However, the atmosphere of doom that hangs over the book is too pervasive to be the result of young love thwarted. The tragic romance, the girl's passionate longing for the nightingales of her native Devon are presumably symbols for the extinction by violence of an ancient civilisation, in which struggle, as in all wars, much that is sweet and innocent is destroyed.

MAIREAD MacSWEENEY.

EXILES, BY JAMES JOYCE. (Cape, 10/6).

Those who were fortunate enough to visit the James Joyce Exhibition in Paris during 1948, saw there the notebook containing Joyce's notes for *Exiles*. These were saved from his flat in Paris during the German occupation, by M. Paul Leon and are

now the property of the University of Buffalo in the United States. They appear for the first time in an edition prefaced by Padraic Colum—all too briefly—and send us back to a re-reading and clearer assessment of the work itself.

Joyce probably never intended that his notes should appear in print, and here and there sentences have either been mis-transcribed or were scribbled down for the writer's own use as he worked out the problems of the play. As Padraic Colum points out, this play has too often been dismissed as Ibsenesque, coming as it does between the far more arresting *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*: "In *Exiles*, the situations, being motivated by a Catholic and not by a Protestant conscience are different from the situations in an Ibsen play."

He also suggests that there is a certain youthfulness in Joyce's note that perhaps the Celtic heroine might supplant the Scandinavian and the Slav. Perhaps Mr. Colum did not wish to use so strong a term as arrogance. Yet surely it did come about that Molly Bloom was later to be given a great deal of attention in the literary world. Joyce suggested, or drew from those surrounding him in his own life, a much more subtle, perhaps more fascinating figure in the Bertha of *Exiles*, but her mind is sometimes dangerously like that of her creator.

In showing that a country, or a culture, exacts a price from those who leave or wish to change her, Padraic Colum also emphasises that:

'In the end, the order that Bertha maintained in herself is shown to be more fundamental than the order Richard would destroy or the order he would create. It is Richard Rowan's sense of fatherhood and Bertha's tenderness for her man that are left as the means by which the transvaluer of accepted values will be healed of his self-inflicted wound. In its structure, *Exiles* is a series of confessions; the dialogue has the dryness of recitals in the confessional; its end is an act of contrition.'

PATRICIA HUTCHINS.

ROCK WAGRAM, BY WILLIAM SAROYAN. (*Faber*, 15/-).

The only thing in this novel that can fairly be called straightforward is the story: Rock Wagram, twenty-five, Armenian, bartender at Fat Aram's in Fresno, California, is discovered by Paul Key, a Hollywood mogul, and transformed into a film-star. Unspoilt by success, Rock, after eight years, is still seeking his real self—which for him means finding the perfect mate and seeing his children born and reared. What he finds is Ann Ford, a beautiful seventeen-year-old liar; he marries her, has two children, and becomes divorced. Woven into this main theme are the subsidiary stories of Paul Key, and of Rock's family, especially his grandmother.



The plot, stripped thus to its essentials, might not seem to Saroyan followers to be quite characteristic of this writer. But nothing is ordinary in Saroyan's hands for he is still ~~the daring~~ young man on the flying trapeze. His particular cartwheel in *Rock Wagram* consists in interpolating, after every few pages, a passage (itself anything from a paragraph to a page or so long and in italics) which is meant to be a philosophical reflection on man in general and Rock Wagram in particular. Such passages, for all their attempted pertinence and pregnancy, are rather disembodied soulless things, for it is not easy to determine whether they are intended as Saroyan's own comments or as the subconscious reflective processes of his hero. Whether or which, they are a failure—the novel's only failure—in that they add nothing to it. They are woolly, repetitious, automatic, and inclined to pall. But the strange thing is that if they add nothing to the novel, neither do they take from it. Their function seems too like that of teacher's explanatory marginal notes and, as such, the reader will rightly reject them. He will reject them, not by disagreeing (for his own conclusions may well be the same) but by ignoring them, by skipping them altogether.

What is left may be a shorter novel but it is also an unimpaired, deeply sincere, and brilliantly-told story. There is no writer alive better than Saroyan when it comes to describing his own people, particularly his own family; and the portrait of Rock Wagram's grandmother is one of the best things he has ever done. The hero himself, and his whole dilemma, are real and truthfully drawn: prototypes of people and situations which seem to be almost the norm in America and are by no means unusual nearer home. *Rock Wagram* is warm and moving, and the direct narration in it is the work of a master. It is one of Saroyan's least typical efforts and most successful; and it is also a development of the new strain of 'hard core' writing and observation that has lately become evident in his work. It has depth and direction, and rises pungently and irresistibly from the market place of the soul.

D.M.

CEOL AGUS AMHRANAIOCHT NA hEIREANN (IRISH FOLK MUSIC AND SONG). BY DONAL O SULLIVAN (Published for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland by Colm O Lochlainn, Dublin, at the Sign of the Three Candles. 2/-).

In the realm of Irish Folk Song Mr. O Sullivan is supreme. His word is authoritative; he is our best, one is tempted to say our only, musicologist. His latest pamphlet is doubly welcome, for since the posthumous publication of Dr. Henebry's *Handbook of Irish Music* (Cork University Press, 1928) there has been little

serious contribution to the study of Irish Music. Mr. O Sullivan's brochure is a lucid introduction to the subject; he lists the standard published collections of Irish Music, and describes those still in manuscript, including the latest (made under the aegis of the Irish Folklore Commission). This vast field has never been properly worked. Mr. O Sullivan made an excellent beginning with his revised edition of Bunting published by the Irish Folk Song Society in six volumes which deal with the first two volumes of Bunting; there the work ceased, as the Irish Folk Song Society collapsed for lack of support.

For at least a week of centuries a paean of praise for Irish music and musicians has swelled our pride; a just, albeit now an empty pride. We have inherited a corpus of incomparably beautiful melodies, but we have sold our birthright: we have discarded these songs, which conserve the quintessence of our nationhood. Their revival is of even greater import than the revival of the language itself. Had a tithe of the time and energy and money which have been misapplied in the drive for the revival of the language—essential though that is—been available to promote the study of our folksong, the language movement would have benefited. Mr. O Sullivan speaks of the profound effect of the change of language on the national character and psychology, and tells us: "Nobody who has not immersed himself in them [folksongs] can realize the exquisite aesthetic pleasure which they are capable of giving," and an tAthair Peadar has told us (Fuinne na Smól—Introduction) that there is no better way to learn the language than by memorising these songs.

The present Minister for Education has shown himself energetic, constructive and imaginative in tackling his problems. Would that he could wring funds even from the austerity Budget to enable the Director of Studies in Irish Folk Music to complete his revision of Bunting, to publish his volume on Carolan, "the last of the Bards", and to train groups of workers in Dublin, Cork and Galway to do some of the essential work: comprehensive indexing and cataloguing of some ten or twelve thousand airs; publication of a definitive edition of Gaelic Folk Song. If the Treasury prove intransigent, perhaps the Arts Council, or other organ of propaganda would beg, borrow or steal postage stamps enough to send a copy of Mr. O Sullivan's essay to our tycoons at home and overseas; one of them with vision might be tempted to live in history as an Irish Maecenas.

This booklet is highly recommended, despite a puzzling reluctance to appreciate the stature of Hardebeck. Other well-known collectors are ignored: Seumas and Maighréad Clandillon, Captain Francis O'Neill, Frank Roche, Father Walsh—and Mr. O Sullivan shirks any discussion of the ungrateful problem of the tonality of these airs. Might he not at least have acknowledged the existence of Mr. Henebry's above-mentioned tortuous attempt to define a peculiarly Irish scale?



The title of this opusculé seems tautological; Song is a branch of Music. Then, too, some of our traditional songs are true *lieder*, more complex and highly organised than the relatively artless folk song. Ceol ar an tsean nós Ghaedhlach (anglice: traditional Gaelic music) is more comprehensive, and preferable.

Format is uniform with that of the other publications in this series, and the illustrations and the printing are fully up to the standard one expects from the Three Candles Press, which is praise indeed.

S.N.

IRELAND AND THE IRISH, BY CHARLES DUFF. (*T. V. Boardman & Co., 15/-*).

The road round Ireland is fast becoming a beaten pathway. Our latest circumambulator, Charles Duff, is an extremely pleasant fellow to travel with. An Irishman himself, though he has lived and travelled much outside the country, he knows us at firsthand and has studied our history to good effect. The result is a highly competent though not altogether satisfying book.

Mr. Duff states his thesis with engaging irony. "All things considered the Irish seem to be human beings more or less like other Western Europeans." But he is baffled by a vague quality in us—psychological of course—which he aptly names "Irishness." Its haunting shadow is beside him as he tip-toes down the corridors of Irish history, but he emerges at the present day with never a growl from the undisturbed sleeping dogs.

He maintains the same caution in the pub where he listens much and breaks into speech only to order another round of pints. "The devil of a decent man," audibly remarks one of the crowd, "but tough", he adds in a whisper. Tough, not in the American sense, but in its countryside meaning of discreet, reticent, refusing to take sides.

After this ill-mannered grouse let me aver that Mr. Duff's book can be read with interest by any Irishman, and that it is of special value to visitors either English or American. Mr. Duff envisages the type of tourist who likes to explore a district thoroughly, and who will return to this country again and again. He lists a number of convenient centres from which the tourist can issue each morning to some neighbouring place of interest returning each evening to his base. I would suggest "rookeries" as an alternative name for "convenient centres", but one must not be facetious about the tourist traffic.

The one comic touch in the book is the jacket design by S. Horne-Shepherd. It includes a sunburst, round tower, cromlech, spinningwheel and pig. The design is perhaps symbolic; the pig, very much overweight by present marketing standards, is regarding the spinningwheel with the jealous eye of a jilted rival.



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"Manufacturers moryah!" he snorts, "once on a time I was the gintleman that paid the rint."

TIM O'DONOGHUE.

TYRONE PRECINCT, BY W. R. HUTCHINSON. (*W. Erskine Mayne, Ltd.*, 15/-).

This book dedicated to the citizens of Dungannon is an exhaustive history of that town and the country surrounding. Its most interesting chapter for southern readers is that which deals with the Volunteer Convention of Dungannon which led to Ireland's eighteen years of legislative independence.

The excellent relations between Presbyterians and Catholics at the time are evidenced by the statement of the Bangor Presbytery in 1872: "We congratulate our Roman Catholic countrymen on the prospect of the repeal of those laws which subjected their teachers and their religious assemblies to insult or penalty." And in 1784 Presbyterians attended the opening ceremony at the first Catholic Church to the erection of which they had subscribed. But in 1798 the Hon. George Knox's motion for complete Emancipation for Catholics was defeated by 161 votes to 69 in a Dublin parliament.

T. O'D.

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